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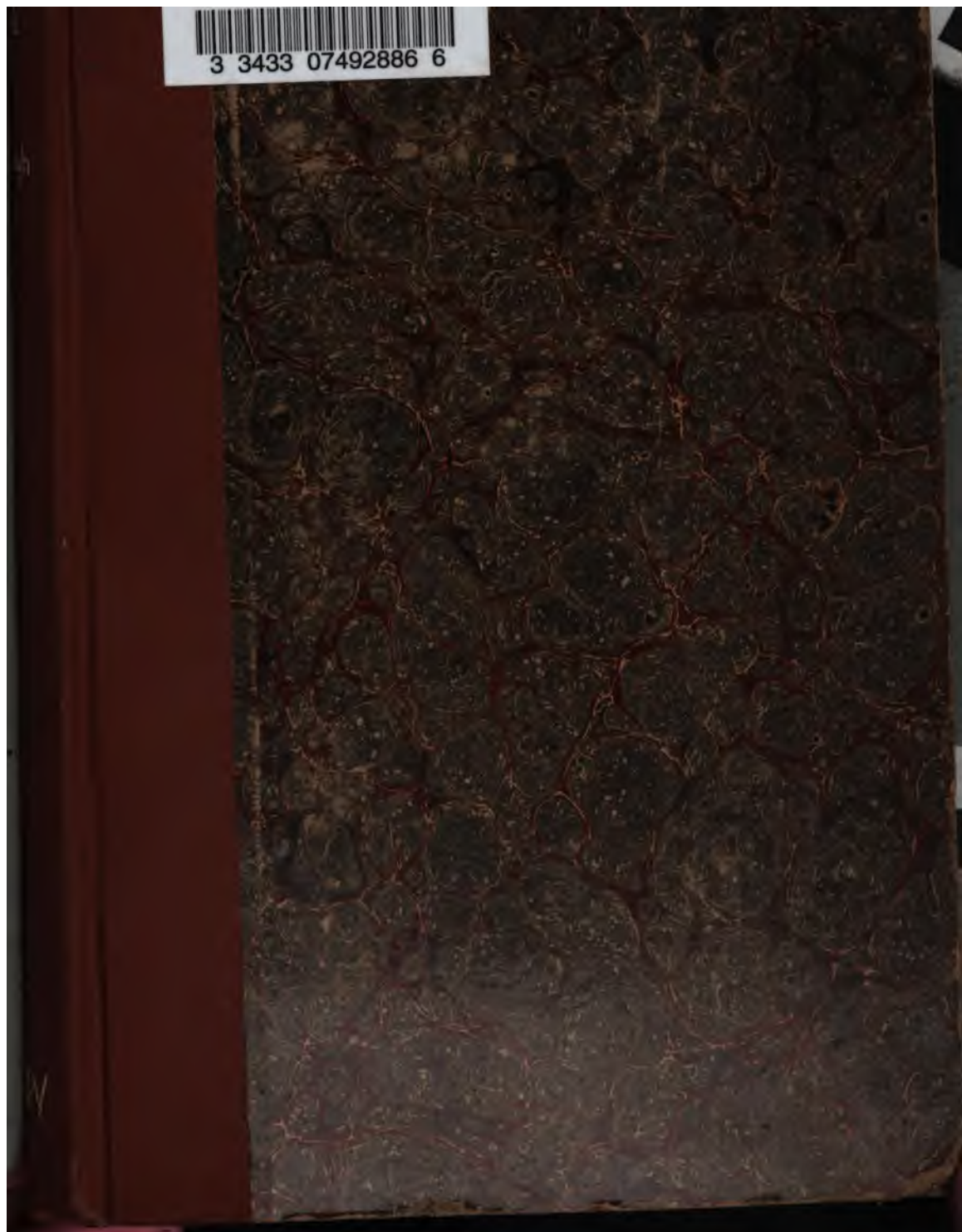
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IN A PROMISED LAND

A Novel

BY

M. A. BENGOUGH



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IN A PROMISED LAND

A Novel

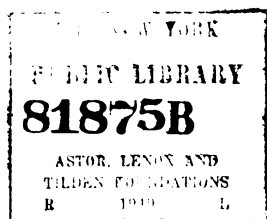
BY

M. A. BENGOUGH



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1893 X



IN A PROMISED LAND

CHAPTER I

THE lower end of Castlegate is no longer the fashionable quarter of Marston. But seventy or eighty years ago, in the days before London had socially swamped the county towns, good families had thought it no scorn to dwell there, and good houses are to be found there still. Tall, dark, solid-looking houses, with long, square-paned windows, and a pediment over the door; inside, the rooms are wainscoted, and the window-sills deep enough for seats. Behind, there may be a garden, shut in by high brown walls overgrown with broad-leaved ivy, with a grass-plot in the middle, and a gravel walk all round; at the end, perhaps, a sort of shrubbery clustering round one central tree. In such houses the contemporaries of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse sewed and painted and sang, drank tea, chatted, made their calls. Now, for the most part, lawyers and agents, local officials and warehousemen, there pass their dusty days. The windows out of which the Janes and Catherines of old may have watched for their admirers now afford a momentary distraction to a yawning clerk, or to the errand-boy who, in an interval of business, chases a blue-bottle across the grimy panes.

One of these houses, however, has found a different fate. There is little, outwardly, to distinguish it from its neighbors. The windows of the lower rooms are protected by the same grim, brown wire blinds as those of the estate-agent below, and of the registrar's office above; only the brightness of the panes, the well-swept steps, the smoke curling from the chimneys, show it to be a place not only to work but to dwell in. Only, morning and evening, when the windows are open in summer, the dusty silence of the street is stirred by the shrill clearness of women's voices. It is a hymn they sing, set to some old-fashioned, high-pitched tune; and they sing it, though sweetly enough, in that rather nasal drawl which

seems to characterize the devotional melody of the sects. But the inmates are seldom seen; their days are passed in almost conventual seclusion. Once a week, perhaps, a little troop of girls, in charge of an elder woman, may be seen passing down Castlegate in double file, to break rank for an hour in the meadows by the river, and then return. And when Sunday comes, the door into the outer world opens once more, and they are marched by narrow and retired ways to the little brick chapel in an almost deserted square somewhere behind the jail.

Few people, comparatively, even in Marston, are aware of their existence. The establishment appears in the list of local institutions. Now and then, in showing a friend over the town, one of the clergy, maybe, will point out "a school in which the Primitive Gospellers educate the daughters of their missionaries."

It appears, on inquiry, that the sect has several mission stations in various parts of the world, but is little known at home. In Marston, at any rate, it has few adherents, and has never been known to make a proselyte. The subject seldom seems to possess any further interest for inquirers, whose curiosity, even if aroused, would probably meet with little reward. Meanwhile, the daughters of the Primitive Gospellers come and go—mostly at long intervals—all unnoticed; their life, with its humdrum or romance, withdrawn equally from sight and speculation inside their cloisteral walls.

It was Saturday afternoon in early summer—mending time. But in virtue of its being nominally a holiday, the bands of discipline were, to a certain extent, relaxed. Therefore, instead of being ranged, stiff and silent, upon the backless forms at the ink-stained desks, the girls were sitting on the grass under the willow-tree at the end of the garden. Some had finished their sewing, and were half lying on their elbows in the shade, to the envy of their less fortunate companions, or strolling, linked in twos and threes, round the circular path. Now and then one of the workers would plunge her arm ruefully into the large basket which stood in the middle, and draw out a pair of stockings, whose shortcomings she would proceed to exhibit at their worst to enlist public sympathy. And all the place was made cheery with a constant flow of chatter and girlish laughter.

The girls were of all ages, from seven or eight to nineteen. They were all dressed alike in a sort of uniform: cotton gowns, white as to the grounding and covered with a pale and uninteresting sprig, made rigorously plain, and fastened round the waist with a black

leather belt; their collars and cuffs were of the demure, turned-down type worn by hospital nurses. All the younger girls had their hair kept short. It was not a becoming costume in itself, and only an exceptionally pretty or striking face could have resisted the general levelling effect which all uniforms seem to give.

Now, the average of the girls' looks was no higher than would be found in any unselected score or so of maidens in their rank of life. Such pleasantness as youth must always have for the eye, when accompanied by health, content, and ordinary intelligence, was to be found in plenty: fresh complexions, glossy hair, well-rounded figures, and features neither classical nor piquant, nor anything at all but nineteenth-century English—and English of the lower middle-class type. Thus it happened that any face which did rise above the ordinary standard became more noticeable, by a sort of surprise, than it might have been under ordinary circumstances.

One such face, however, could scarcely have passed unnoticed anywhere. Seated somewhat apart from the others, the centre of a group of little ones whom she was instructing in the mysteries of darning, was a girl rather older than the rest; she might have been two or three and twenty. It was no beauty of feature that attracted attention to her. Neither did she owe anything to coloring or figure; she was not above the medium height, and was proportioned with that commonplace correctness which is as far removed from beauty as from ugliness. Her hair, very smooth and straight, was a sort of pale straw-color, her eyes a faint gray, and her complexion pallid rather than white. Her mouth was disfigured by projecting teeth, but her teeth themselves were her only beauty, being exquisitely white, though large. It is true that nothing small would have seemed in keeping with this woman. For though plain and unimposing, her face expressed an amount of character almost startling in one still so young. It was, in fact, the face of an enthusiast; of one of those enthusiasts who lead, not follow. It was entirely wanting in every possibility of humor; there was no mobility about it, no suggestion of any great breadth of sympathy or interest; it had few capacities for passion. But it had infinite capacities for exaltation.

Indeed, the exaltation never appeared to be far off. Enthusiasm seemed to be so much the possessing, the permanent quality of this young woman's soul, that no common word or act could be quite so common and material with her as with every one else. Whatever might be the intense monotony of her outward circumstances,

however limited her range, it was as impossible to think of her as ever being dull as it was to imagine her being amused.

She had been interrupted in the middle of some narrative by a difficulty of one of her pupils; there was no trace of impatience in her manner when she broke off her sentence short to attend to the child's needs, though, from the indignant remonstrances of her audience, she seemed to be coming to a crisis in the story. In a minute or so she resumed, without any apparent loss of continuity or confusion of ideas. A certain spiritual luminosity, which her pale face took on, in place of any physical glow, when she was much moved, showed her own interest in the tale to be no less than that of her hearers.

"But when the savages saw that their prisoner was gone, they all came rushing to the missionary's house, yelling, and brandishing their spears; and they cried out to him in their language, that he should bring the woman out to them, because she was a witch and must not be allowed to live, or else all their cattle would die with sickness as Mbesa's cows had died. Then Mr. Martin came and stood in the door of his house and spoke to them and said: 'Friends, I cannot do this thing—and God forbid that I should if I could. The woman is not here.' Then they were much more angry, and they bade him say which way she had gone; but he would not, only tried still to turn their hearts, if he might. And some would have killed him, but others said: 'Not so; let us rather make him tell.' Then they ran upon him, and took him, and bound him with leather thongs till the blood started from his wrists and ankles, and so dragged him along the ground to the great place in front of the headman's hut; and for six hours they did their worst. I have not the heart to tell, nor you to hear, what he had the heart to bear. Six hours, and then he died."

"And did the woman get safe to the fort?"

"No; she must have missed her way, and two days later, a party of her tribe, coming back from some expedition, found her lying in the veld half dead with thirst and terror, and took her back, and she was put to death."

There was a pause; the children looked rather blank.

"Then it was all for nothing, and not worth while, after all?" said one at last.

"Not worth while?" echoed the narrator, with a sort of surprise.

"Oh, my dear," she began.

Her voice, rather deep, but not otherwise remarkable, became

sonorous in moments of strong feeling; then, though not musical, it was not exactly unmelodious. It had taken this tone, now, but the sentence was cut short. A spare elderly woman had come out on the steps leading from the house into the garden; there was a little fluttering hush among the girls when she appeared; they fluttered into silence, like canaries when a covering is thrown upon the cage.

"Sarah Bowman and Martha Williams," she called, "the mistress wishes to see you at once in the parlor."

A girl who had been lying on her back upon the grass near the workers, her arms beneath her head, her plain straw hat with its brown ribbon tilted half over her face to keep the sun out of her eyes, sprang up with a sort of start. The hat fell aside and revealed a face almost as noticeable for its beauty as the other was for its force. Not beauty of the most refined type, perhaps—black eyes, black hair, a brilliant complexion. On a larger scale it might have threatened heaviness or even coarseness; but this girl was so small, so vivacious, that this emphatic color and brilliancy only gave a delightful childlike audacity to her appearance. In her prim, precise uniform frock she sparkled among her stolidly cheerful companions like a cupid got astray among a flock of tombstone cherubs.

She stayed a moment to pick up her hat and smooth her hair.

"It can't be a scrape this time," she said, "as Sarah's in it. What will it be, girls?"

She did not wait for an answer; ten years' discipline had not been altogether lost upon her, and obedience, instantaneous and unquestioning, was one of the foundation-stones of the system. Sarah, moving to the summons with a military or, perhaps, monastic precision, was already at the foot of the steps when Martha caught her up. Nothing seemed less likely than any mutual attraction between these two, yet Martha—or Mattie, to give her the name by which she was best known to herself—slung her arm round Sarah's waist, and Sarah's look grew motherly, as it could, as she took the little hand. They passed through the deserted school-room—a room severely plain, the floor uncarpeted, the walls blank, the lower half of the windows whitened for the restraint of wandering eyes—and by narrow passages and unexpected steps reached the door of the parlor. Sarah knocked, and a woman's voice bade them enter.

Probably, neither girl was prepared for what she saw. The not very large room seemed, at first sight, full of men. As their eyes, after the first moment of surprise, began to convey juster ideas to

their startled minds, they saw that the six members of the school-committee were assembled before them. Seated a little in front was a kindly-looking old man, the minister; and beside him, near a table covered with papers, the mistress.

The mistress of the Missionary School of the Primitive Gossellers at Marston was not an ordinary woman. Only to look at her you felt that she was born to be a trainer of enthusiasts, of fanatics if you will, and that the unflappable temperament and admirable common-sense of the vast majority of the girls who passed through her hands was, to her, at once a marvel and a constant mortification. Unable, of course, to understand her, her pupils stood in desperate awe of her; perhaps she had never won the love, as certainly she had never won the confidence, of any. Of all the girls with whom she had ever had to do, Sarah Bowman alone was capable of comprehending her; and Sarah, though youth and inexperience gave her something of the severe inflexibility which was inherent in Miss Grover's character, had yet an innate motherliness which found no point of contact or sympathy with the unqualified fanaticism of the mistress.

There was a short pause after the girls came in. They stood together near the door, conscious of scrutiny from many eyes which had, probably, never before realized the fact of their individual existence. Sarah bore the ordeal with self-possession, but Martha was visibly nervous. Her quick color came and went, her little hands moved restlessly, she pressed nearer to her companion, till she almost seemed to be leaning upon her. Sarah's eyes maintained the ordinary level quiet of their gaze, but Martha's sank and wandered, as seeking some escape from the silent criticism, which, indeed, seemed much less favorably inclined to her than to the elder girl. At last, Miss Grover looked towards the minister. It was almost comically clear that her deference was a somewhat grudging tribute to his official character, and not at all due to any sense of his personal qualifications for a task which, it is true, she would have fulfilled herself with much greater composure. The old man pulled some letters out of his pocket, and began to fumble with them; the thin, foreign paper rustled and crackled in his hands, tremulous at once with age and with a certain flurry.

"My dear young friends," he began at last, "we have sent for you on a matter of serious importance. I have had a communication from Mr. Glasse, the minister in charge of our mission settlement at Beulah. You know where Beulah is?" he asked, as if glad to interrupt himself.

"In South Africa, sir," said Sarah. And now her even breath began to come a little quicker.

"An admirable climate and a most encouraging work," put in a member of the committee, consolingly; but no one heeded, and the girls did not even hear.

"Mr. Glasse writes to tell me that two of the younger brethren, his fellow-workers, have now arrived at an age and a spiritual condition in which it is advisable, for their own sakes and for the good of the work, that each should take unto him a wife. He therefore begs me to do for them according to our customs. My dear young friends, this custom is not unknown to you; you will, I am sure, receive our decision in a spirit worthy of your high calling—a decision to which we have not come without much seeking of counsel, both from the Lord and from the brethren."

He paused a moment, put on his glasses, and made a feint of referring to the letter.

"Sarah Bowman, it is arranged that you shall go out to Beulah to become the wife of Samuel Arkwright; Martha Williams to become the wife of Jesse Runciman."

CHAPTER II

No doubt, as the minister said, the girls had heard of this custom. But it had never chanced to be brought under their notice as an actual fact; from other schools girls had been so summoned, but not, in their time, from their own. But, after all, the effect of the announcement, when it was made about themselves, could scarcely have been other than tremendous, however often they might have witnessed the situation as spectators.

For some moments no one moved or spoke; then Martha broke the silence by bursting into tears. The committee looked variously awkward, as men must; the old minister, past the age of awkwardness, felt really sorry for her. It did not exactly strike him as a dreadful thing that a girl should be suddenly plucked from the home of all her life and sent out into the great unknown, dependent for all future care and guidance on the utter stranger to whom she had been thus irrevocably consigned. This did not strike him as dreadful, because it was the custom, because he had never heard of its working

other than well, and could not conceive that it should. And yet, remembering far-off days, he thought that perhaps such a girl had been deprived of something. His own wooing had been as little romantic as possible—evenings in the back parlor of a small shop; occasional Saturday afternoon walks along the banks of a singularly dreary canal; a bride neither bright nor beautiful, comely at most, and capable. He could not, even in imagination, recall having felt anything approaching to emotion in the whole course of the affair.

Yet even in missing this supremely unexciting, unromantic episode out of her life, he felt dimly that the girl had missed—something. For love will still be lord of all. He may be deprived of every kingly splendor, may fold his radiant pinions under broadcloth; for gems, and rose-crown, and cloth-of-gold, he may assume very humble and unbeautiful attire indeed. Through every disguise we own the magician still; and, looking back to the days in which he walked with us through the land, we know that they were not as other days are, and yet that other days are the better for their having been. And for Mattie they were not to be. No half-sweet, half-painful flutterings of doubt—doubt, at once, of her own heart and of another's. No memory of an hour—was it more looked for or more shrunk from?—in which a few halting words broke down the last of a feeble barrier, and bade the stream of two lives flow henceforth as one. The passage from maidenhood to matronhood lies through an enchanted valley, or by a golden bridge across the misty gulf of dreams; and it is made *à deux*. Mattie was to make it across a mere literal ocean, and to make it alone. Her heart would never quicken to the sound of a lover's footsteps; her lips would never glow beneath a lover's kiss. Yet it was a heart so made for dainty flutterings; a mouth so formed for kisses. Of course, the good minister would have turned, quavering and tremulous, with horror and dismay at the bare idea that any regrets should have occurred to the girl on her own account. Her elders might be allowed, half bashfully, to glance at such a reason for tears; for herself, she could only be permitted to cry because she was startled. And, indeed, she was crying for nothing else. As once she had stood upon the threshold of life, so now, as suddenly and as involuntarily, she stood upon the threshold of womanhood, weeping; as little conscious of any reason for tears in the one case as in the other.

However, tears made the proceedings rather difficult. The minister began a few words of vague consolation; but Miss Grover

broke in with an impatience which years of laborious self-restraint left her all unable to disguise.

"Compose yourself, Martha Williams," she said. "Don't make me ashamed by having nothing to show for your training but such an exhibition of weakness. Now, if ever, it is time to put away childish things. O girl! with such a task before you, have you nothing better to greet it with than tears? What have you got to cry for, I should like to know?"

"I don't know, ma'am," said poor Mattie, feebly, but with truth.

"Then dry your eyes and leave off, there's a good girl. Because it is so silly, you know, to cry for nothing," said a member of the committee, soothingly.

He was a round-faced little man, with an expression like a good little boy in a Sunday pinafore, and was known among his co-religionists, with a reminiscence of the "Pilgrim's Progress," as "'Opeful 'Ickman." By trade he was a grocer, and by condition a widower. His arts of blandishment had been learned, perforce, in the nursery, among his five young children. They were not very successful, as a rule; but he knew no others. He had a nursery mind by nature, and circumstances had developed it.

"Look at Miss Sarah," he went on, admonishingly; "*she* doesn't cry."

There was a sublimity of bathos about this remark which deserved more appreciative recognition than it obtained. Sarah did not cry! From the moment she had heard the words which were to change her life, she had stood like one in a trance, but a trance in which heaven is opened. Her hands were clasped in a sort of ecstasy; her eyes were fixed on vacancy, but their luminous pallor might have seemed a reflection from some vision of bliss ineffable. Now and then her lips moved softly; if all at once she had burst into inspired song—some lowly-exultant magnificat, in which self was too much forgotten even to remember self-abasement—it would scarcely have seemed strange.

Mattie glanced at her, and cried rather more; she was dimly conscious of an aloofness from every worldly consideration which put Sarah very far away from her. Miss Grover looked at her too.

"No; as you say, Mr. Hickman, Sarah does not cry," she said. "Quite the contrary; it almost seems as though she were glad." She spoke very slowly, very coldly; the poor little grocer felt crushed without quite knowing why. Yet the sarcasm was as superficial as the coldness. For there was the strangest suggestion of repressed

emotion in her tone. The heart knoweth its own bitterness; the torture of some forever insatiable craving wrung the underlying cry of those words from the principal's set lips. But between those two women who so thoroughly understood, and yet could not love each other, were such strong spiritual affinities that Miss Grover's voice reached Sarah at a height to which no other sound could rise. It reached her, but it did not bring her down.

"Glad!" she said, "should I not be glad? Surely my mouth should be filled with laughter, and my tongue with joy, seeing that He hath given me my heart's desire, and hath not denied me the request of my lips."

The others scarcely noticed how the principal drew one carefully-measured breath. Yet it contained all the passionate rebellion, the bitter sense of injustice, of a cry: "And I, then, have I had no desires? no prayers?"

"Our prayers may be answered in judgment," said a member.

"I'm not going for to say as our sister's is a case in p'int. We must all 'ope not. Oh, yes, we must 'ope." But he spoke as one who knows that he is making too great a demand on human frailty. "All as I'd be taken to say is as there be sech a thing as liftin' one up to cast one down. To cast one down," he repeated, bending his head slowly, in cadence to his words; he seemed to be mentally contemplating the operation with a satiated melancholy.

"I don't think—I really don't think, that our young friend meant any presumption," said the minister, pacifically. "I really do not think so, Brother Noakes."

Mr. Noakes shook his head gloomily. He was a fat man, and when a fat man is gloomy he goes very far indeed.

"I 'ope not," he said. "I've said as I 'ope not. But the 'eart is deceitful; and if we may say of one poor wor-rum that it be frailer than any other, I should say as the 'eart of a young 'oman was special deceitful, and in nothin' more so than in this 'ankerin' after the work of conversion. I knew a case in p'int."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Hickman.

"I did that. There was a certain sister—call 'er Soosan—as was contracted to a chu'ch member in the town as I used to live in. They was soon to 'ave been made one. Ay! they was that," said Mr. Noakes, his gloom deepening into despondency. "But one Sabbath—ah, I mind it well—there came a stranger to meet'n' and sat 'imself down among the brethren. 'E was a sodger, and 'is goin's on was sech as you might look for."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hickman.

"Now this Soosan cast an eye on 'im, an' she was moved in spirit. That was 'ow she put it to me—I would say to the brother as she was contracted to—when 'e would 'ave reasoned with 'er, thinkin' it was lightness of mind. She felt a call, she said, to the work of 'is conversion. I—the brother, I would say—kind o' doubted; but she could talk—ay! she 'ad a gift of tongues 'ad Soosan—an' in the end 'e bade 'er go on an' prosper. Them was 'is words. It was a bid-din' to go up to Ramoth-Gilead."

"Did she fail?" asked Mr. Hickman, quite anxiously.

"Ay; an' a worse jedgment nor that overtook her. She went an' married him."

Mattie burst into a hysterical giggle. She was not really amused; but the sepulchral solemnity of the narrator, the gloomy silence that reigned among the audience, affected her strained spirits with the reaction which is apt to come upon them at church or at a funeral. Sarah took the little hands gently in one of hers, and, with a soft, firm pressure, subdued the threatened outbreak.

It is a strong soul that can bear to be dragged down from its soaring by such an ineptitude as that story, yet keep the wings of its exaltation unruffled, the eyes of its aspiration clear. Sarah had never witnessed so clearly to the sustaining power of one concentrated enthusiasm as she did then. The light had died out of her face, indeed, and she was very still; but she showed neither shame nor resentment at a story which, she dimly felt, was only not an insult by virtue of its utter imbecility. To her it was not even given to see that it was funny; the dark wave of humiliation touched her lips, unbrightened by the smallest sunbeam of a smile. But even thus cold, the draught could not chill her soul.

The one person who thoroughly enjoyed that anecdote was Miss Grover. She always did enjoy anything that confirmed her in her supreme contempt for the understanding of the opposite sex, and she was in a mood to appreciate to the full any satisfaction that had a dash of bitterness in it. She would do nothing to help any one out, though she saw that matters were practically at a deadlock. But just then a member, who had not yet spoken, but had long been listening with ill-concealed impatience, brought down a pencil on the table beside him with a sharp tap.

"It seems to me as how there's a deal of time bein' wasted," he said. "If so be as I understood aright, we ain't been called here for a missionary meetin', nor yet for an experience meetin'. All

this sort of talk is neither here nor there. Neither o' these young women ain't goin' out, so to say, as a missionary herself."

"Brother Peskett is quite right," said another member. He was a hard-featured, elderly man, with smooth black hair and sharp, light-colored eyes. In social position he was a step higher than the majority, being an auctioneer in a small way of business; and at the meetings of the school-committee he held, virtually, the proud position of chairman—the minister, who nominally filled that post, being of no account. Robert Grinstead was an inborn tyrant; abject submission alone could conciliate him. Between him and Miss Grover there reigned a constant and deadly feud; if there was one creature more than another in whom an independent will was utterly revolting to him, it was a woman. He was not at all a clever man, though his somewhat superior education deluded his colleagues into the belief that he was, and, intellectually, had no chance against the principal, who, with a much more limited education, was a very clever woman. But he was her equal in obstinacy, her superior in staying power of nerve, and in mere argument he had one inestimable advantage over her. In a community where Scripture, in its narrowest and most literal interpretation—the authority of isolated texts, despoiled of their context, forbidden comparison, and quite uninformed by the general spirit of the work, was still, taken with these limitations, recognized as the one rule and standard of social life, Grinstead was able to take his stand on certain expressions in the Epistles, and defy Miss Grover to dislodge him. Her commonsense, at war with her traditions, felt that it was unfair—as, indeed, it was, for the texts were chosen with an arbitrariness, a disregard of consistency, even of common honesty, which a pope might have equalled, but could scarcely have surpassed. But, if only for fear of proving too much, she dared not put the argument on a wider ground, and could not contest it on the narrow one; she was routed, to all appearance, time after time; yet, when he was most certain of final victory, would appear unexpectedly on the flank or in the rear, and by some damaging onslaught certify him that the work of subjugation was to do all over again.

When Grinstead set the seal of his approval on Brother Peskett's remark, that worthy butcher felt exalted in the estimation of the universe. His satisfaction, in turn, pleased Grinstead, who went on with even more decision than usual.

"If you come to that, I doubt whether Scripture would bear us out in permitting such an employment to women, even should they desire it."

"Deborah," said Miss Grover, "was a prophetess, and judged Israel."

"That," replied Mr. Grinstead, conclusively, "was under the old dispensation. We are not under the law, but under grace."

Miss Grover knew perfectly, beforehand, that he would say this; but it was a subject on which she never could decline the field.

"Philip, the deacon, had four daughters, prophetesses."

Mr. Grinstead's face expressed no sort of dismay; a little annoyance at her pertinacity, and a sort of wonder at her bad taste in alluding to what he himself certainly considered must have been a domestic affliction.

"We have no sufficient information," he pronounced, "with regard to the office of prophetess in those days. And it would be the height of presumption, in the absence of all evidence, for us to suppose for a moment that it was carried out in any way that could be at variance with the plain directions of the apostle on the subject. If he would not suffer a woman to teach, we may be quite certain that those young persons did not teach. I think no one will deny this."

No one did; and he went on.

"But that is not the question. We need not trouble ourselves about the fitness or unfitness of these two young women for that position, because it is not what is required of them."

"Oh, no!" cooed Mr. Hickman. "It is something so much easier and happier than that."

"It is not a question of ease or difficulty, far less one of carnal satisfaction," said the other severely. "One—to be a wife—is a woman's business, and the other—to be a missionary—is not. And I have no doubt that, in their own line of business, these young persons are quite competent."

"Indeed, sir, I don't think you have made our work look any easier," said Sarah, with half a sigh.

"No right-minded young woman *can* find any difficulty in that position," he said, dogmatically.

"It is a very high one," said Sarah, quietly.

"It is a very natural one," he replied, and Sarah said no more. Perhaps her silence did not strike him as the result of conviction, far less of submission, for it exasperated instead of soothing him.

"It is the simplest arrangement," he said, impatiently; "a child could understand it. Here are two young men who, if they are to labor to any purpose in the vineyard, must be set free from serving

tables. For this cause they must take unto them wives. What will be the business of the young women called to this position? Clearly, so to order all carnal affairs that our brethren may give themselves wholly and undisturbed to the work of the Lord. To clean, to cook, to sew—what decently educated female could be unequal to such duties as these? There is nothing to make a sensation about in all that.”

There certainly was not. If, in fact, the prospect was capable of being levelled to a more deadly flatness, toned down to a grayer monotony, not even Mr. Noakes knew how to do it. There was a pause; then Miss Grover said,

“Ah, well; I think they will find both Sarah Bowman and Martha Williams very fair cooks.”

She said it in a tone which flustered the minister and chilled the blood in Mr. Hickman’s veins. Grinstead raged inwardly; but Sarah’s eyes met the principal’s. It was a look almost of rebuke, and Miss Grover turned aside from it.

“We will both try and do our duty, sir, whatever it is; won’t we, Mattie?” she said. “To be the servant of a servant of the Lord is blessed work too.”

“And a help-meet, a help-meet for him,” said the minister. He had flushed a little, and spoke with more decision than was usual with him. “You must not forget that, Brother Grinstead. Oh, my good friend, when, after forty years of married life, it pleased the Lord, in His wisdom, to take my dear wife from me, it wasn’t the comforts that I missed—though my Mary had her full share of Martha’s gifts, and I’m not saying that things have been so comfortable since. But it wasn’t that; it was my true yoke-fellow in the work of the Lord; which may He make these, our sisters, to be to the husbands of His choice, and their husbands unto them.” He paused a moment, then went on more calmly. “And I have no doubt that it will be so; no doubt of it. Mr. Glasse sends me a most full and affectionate account of the young men. Samuel Arkwright has been like a son to him for years, and Jesse Runciman must be one whom to know is to esteem—a laborer of exceptional power and zeal.”

At this point Mattie began to dry her eyes, and ventured, through her dewy lashes, a glance which asked for further information. The minister, much encouraged, referred again to the letter.

“Both young men are five-and-twenty years of age. And (though of course this is a matter of no real importance) my reverend broth-

er, knowing that we can't quite expect old heads on young shoulders, has kindly added that neither is so unprepossessing in appearance as to inspire a foolish aversion."

"Beauty being deceitful, and favor vain, such an aversion would be something worse than foolish, in any case," said Grinstead pointedly, looking at Mattie, whose face had brightened considerably at this assurance. It was, to be sure, very negative praise. But since this poor Beauty was not, apparently, to be handed over to an unmitigated Beast, what should hinder her from picturing the unknown as a fairy prince? Her ideas of that splendid being may have been tolerably prosaic; no doubt they were; but no doubt also they were, at worst, visions of something rather more sublime than she had ever actually met in life. And there, at the other side of the world, in a land strange beyond imagining, beneath strange stars, what might one not expect?

Martha's spirits, subdued merely by the momentary shock, began to rise towards a pitch unknown before. Miss Grover watched her with eyes of bitter scorn, but did not remonstrate again. Sarah looked pleased at the girl's returning courage; for herself it was not easy to guess what she was feeling; to all appearance she was absolutely calm.

"And now, my dear young friends," said the minister, "I will not detain you; you will be glad, no doubt, to think over this change in your circumstances by yourselves. I am sure you both feel quite rightly about this subject; no foolish flippancy, I am glad to see, no rebellious refusals. Settling in life is a serious matter for any young woman; every well-brought-up one must feel it a great rest and satisfaction when her older and wiser friends kindly consent to make all arrangements for her. Then she has nothing to do but trust them entirely. And when we think of the many dangers of choice, and see on what very insufficient grounds giddy young women so often make it, and so come to much misery, I'm sure you ought to be very thankful to be spared it."

It was curious how much more the men present, even those who had not Grinstead's objection, dwelt on the husband than on the missionary; whereas, to two out of the three women concerned, the work was what so filled the field of their mental vision that the thought of marriage became a mere unobtrusive detail, merely part of the necessary preliminaries. It was the work which Miss Grover had fretted to see so thrown away on Martha; it was the thought of the work that stirred Sarah's inmost soul with mingled joy and awe.

The girls made their courtesy and withdrew. As the door closed behind them a slight general movement ran through the room; it was a movement of relief. All the men looked at one another furtively, and each anxious not to be caught looking; each was secretly trying to gather his neighbor's opinion of the affair—was this thing wisely done? These men were sincere; it was by no mere canting formula that the minister had described them as praying for guidance. But though they had enough of the courage of their convictions to act upon, they scarcely had enough to rest upon, without misgivings. For, after all, men can be courageous on much slighter conviction than is required to make them confident.

What most reconciled them to their own decision was Miss Grover's opposition. It was such a grand opportunity for paying off old scores—and the score the committee had against their principal was a heavy one, accumulated through many sessions of persistent snubbing. That she had a prejudice against Martha was clear; there was scarcely a man of them all who did not think such a prejudice perfectly explicable on the part of a hard-favored elderly spinster towards a young and very pretty girl who had got a husband. Mercifully this interpretation of her conduct never once occurred to her as possible.

If, after all, Mattie should be a little weak, a little flighty, even—and Miss Grover had not hesitated to affirm that she was both—the defect was venial, indeed, in a little beauty, and the most orthodox of all remedies was at hand. So there was no one to contradict the minister when he said, as he rose to take his hat:

"Yes, my brethren, I do think we are doing the best possible thing for our young friends, for both of them, but more especially for Martha Williams. From all I can learn Jesse Runciman is the very man of all others to whom we may most hopefully commit a young woman of good principles and warm affections, whose only failing seems to be a little want of strength and balance. Because, if there is one thing more than another for which this young man is particularly admirable, it would seem to be just his steadiness and strength of principle. Nothing could be better."

And they all agreed that, indeed, nothing could be better—for Martha Williams. What it might be for Jesse Runciman did not seem to occur to any one.

CHAPTER III

THERE followed a time of what would have been confusion in any ordinary household; but in the school in Castlegate nothing was ever allowed to amount to that. Still, the course of life was somewhat quickened, new and strange incidents broke the monotony of the daily routine. Such incidents! The arrival of a couple of modest travelling-trunks; the stoppage at the door of the big draper's cart with mysterious packages; the suspension of the ordinary school sewing in favor of the articles needed for the outfit—an outfit in which the emigrant was more considered than the bride. As these girls were to know nothing of the springtide joys of wooing, so neither were the pretty butterfly vanities of the trousseau to be theirs. So simple were the preparations, so admirable the organization, that in three weeks from the day on which they had been summoned to hear their fate, Sarah and Mattie were ready to start.

Then came a dreamlike time when everything was new. The very journey to London was an event exciting enough to dry Mattie's farewell tears in a very short time. She had cried, of course; not very passionately, but quite sincerely. Little homelike as it was, the school had been all the home the girls had ever known, and if it had not much hold on their affections, it had on their confidence. There was the sacred security of custom about it.

The summer sunrise was but just gilding the weather-cocks on the church steeples when they left Marston, and London was scarcely more than warming up to its day's work when they arrived. But to the girls it seemed a wild and desperate confusion, amid which they clung to the elderly deacon who had been sent to take them across London and down to Southampton, as to a pillar of strength.

This gratified him very much, because he was really a nervous, fussy little man, to whom porters and flymen were accustomed to pay but scant respect, whom policemen patronized and officials snubbed. To have these two creatures, even so much more helpless than himself, depending on him, gave him a sense of importance and of dignity as new as it was beautiful.

And Mattie, at least, was ostentatiously and demonstratively dependent, and she looked very pretty so, and fluttered charmingly. Mattie was the sort of girl whom a young man of a certain stamp would greatly enjoy escorting through a field of cows. Brother Trigg was not a young man, by any means; but he was not so old either as to be insensible to the agreeables of the situation. It was decidedly agreeable to have a pretty young woman thrusting her head out of the fly to follow his every movement, as he collected the luggage, with the most obvious anxiety not to lose sight of him; decidedly agreeable to hear her exclaim in a gush of gratitude, "Oh! I was afraid you had gone away and left us, and what should we do in this dreadful place alone?"

She had her head out of the window half the time, shrieked very musically whenever she feared a collision—which was pretty often, asked a hundred questions, most of them so amazingly ignorant that he could not help showing as a prodigy of general information by comparison, and altogether fairly won his heart.

Her spirits lasted well through the short journey to Southampton, and even to within sight of the docks. But then, all at once, as the shipping came into view through a gap, and Brother Trigg pointed out a certain steamer as that by which they were to go (it was the wrong one, but that was a detail), a sudden terror fell upon her, and struck her dumb. It was not he that could give her comfort now; she turned to Sarah, and read the awe born of a mighty crisis reflected in her face as though from Mattie's own.

The two girls stood hand in hand near a gangway, while their escort fussed hither and thither, trying to discover which was the right steamer. Now that it had become practically important to ascertain this fact, he felt many degrees less sure of it than he had done five minutes before. He was smitten, moreover, with a sudden paroxysm of incredulity, which forbade him to rest satisfied with any one answer, however authoritatively expressed. The girls were scarcely conscious of his absence. They stood exchanging nervous pressures, but never a word; for what was to be said when they did not even know how they felt? Crowds came and went about them; the air was vibrant with the shouting of sailors and dock-laborers, the clatter of trucks and drays, the rattling of chains, the laboring gasps of pent-up steam. The confusion around them added to the confusion within: regrets, hopes, fears, exultation quickened their pulses and shook their souls. The swell of the full tide of the ocean of life began to send such tremors through their being as the

swell of the salt billows sends quivering through the bark newly launched upon their bosom.

At last Brother Trigg returned from his voyage of discovery.

"This 'ere's the mail, after all," he said, in rather an injured tone, pointing to the steamer near which they already stood. "I could have found out this long while since, but everybody one speaks to seems clean off their 'ead with 'urry and worry. There's no getting a sensible answer, let alone a civil one. It's 'orrid the way things is arranged at these places—shove 'ere, and scramble there—a reg'lar scrimmage. Why can't they begin to get ready in good time, so's not to 'ave all this fuss? There's nothing more 'inderin' in the end than 'urry and fuss. 'More 'aste, worse speed,' that's my motter. Mind that, Miss Mattie; you look to me, and keep quiet, and you'll be all right. Now then, where's them umbrellas? Eh? I took 'em out of the train? Everything *I* took out I put together in a 'eap. Then they're stole! Police! Where's the police? Nowhere, of course. Oh, sir, 'ave you seen— Bless me, there they are, behind that packing-case. All right, sir. And now, my dears, if you've got all your traps, we'd better be going on board."

As they set foot on the gangway, the steamer gave an unearthly shriek. Brother Trigg sprang back with agility.

"Oh, it's going! I'm sure it isn't time! 'Urry, Miss Sarah! 'urry, Miss Mattie! Stop!" to a sailor on board, who happened to lay a hand on the rail of the gangway, "you mustn't take it up yet; these two are going to go! Good-by, my—"

At this moment he discovered that there were no signs of a move, and with a temporary return of the calmness he so much commended he went up and joined the girls on deck.

His nervous dread of being carried off to a land which he pictured to himself as inhabited entirely by savages, and roamed over by lions, tigers, and the boa-constrictor, kept him standing as close as possible to the entrance of the gangway, where he was very much in the way, and attracted much uncomplimentary notice from the passers to and fro. But he was accustomed to execrations in public places, where his talent for getting in the way was something exceptional, and they did not ruffle him in the least.

"You'll mind and give my respects to the Reverend Glasse when you see 'im—Brother Trigg's respects, and I 'ope 'e's got 'is 'ealth. It's a long way for you to be going by yourselves, to be sure; but they do say Africa's not such a bad climate as some—not, as you might say, right down poisonous. I do mind 'aving read in one of

them missionary tracks of a part they call 'The White Man's Grave.' There was a little print to it with palm-trees and long, flat white things; but whether they was tombs or 'ouses, I couldn't say. But I gathered that part wasn't just where you're going; maybe it's as much as a 'undred or two 'undred miles away. Of course, being as it's Africa, it must be 'ot; but you mind whenever you go out of doors, and just put a cabbage-leaf inside your 'at, then you needn't ever be afraid of sunstroke. Simple, ain't it? but it's first-rate. 'Twas Mrs. Trigg's father as told me. 'E's a market-gardener, and last August bank-holiday we was spending the day with 'im at 'is 'ouse in 'Ammersmith, and 'e showed me 'ow it was done. You just pick your cabbage-leaf—as it might be this 'andkerchief—and you take and put it in your 'at, so—"

At that moment, as he stood with his arm stretched out, hat in hand, much as if he were about to do a conjuring trick, some hasty passenger, hurrying on board, for time was getting short, jerked the hat out of his hand, and sent it spinning down the gangway. Before he could do more than utter one cry of anguish, it was rescued by a young man coming up. With an almost languid leisureliness of motion, contrasting strongly with the general rush of movement round him, he strolled up the planks, restored the hat to its owner with the shadow of a bow, let his glance rest for one half-interested second on the girls, and passed on. A rapid observer might just have gathered that he was a gentleman, and that he was there under protest; no more. But a girl's eyes, which see little in most directions, see a good deal in one—Mattie could have told that he was good-looking.

But now the order to clear the ship is given; news-venders and fruit-sellers in haste, friends and relatives lingeringly, begin to stream down the gangway; the thinned ranks left behind press to the side; there is a moment when quay and crowds seem gliding noiselessly away from the apparently motionless vessel; then motion grows perceptible, more pulsating, swifter. One look, and faces are still distinct; the next, though given with eyes hastily cleared of blind-tears, forms alone are to be recognized. But already these are lost in a mere dark, irregular line; and then those may weep who list, for there is no glimpse left which tears might lose.

Sarah and Mattie sank down side by side upon a bench, and cried with little restraint. The social traditions of that rank of life exact no very Spartan repression of emotional exhibitions, and theirs were not the only undisguised sobs to be heard on board.

Of course, however, the passengers to whom a voyage to the Cape was still in any sense a sentimental journey, were in the minority. Of the majority, many were colonists born, returning home with only such mild regret as attends the end of a pleasant holiday. These were first-class passengers. Coming down lower in the social scale, there were various specimens of "our Mr. Jones," by whom a trip or two from Africa to Europe in the course of the year was scarcely more thought of than a journey from London to Liverpool by their brethren of English commerce. These were noticeable among the rest by their robust cheerfulness and old-traveller airs; and these, too, were among the last to cease to attempt communication with the shore. But, indeed, with one or two exceptions, all the passengers, whether they had friends on shore or not, seemed equally loath to quit the side. Distractions do not abound on an ocean voyage, and it is prudent not to lose a moment of looking at any outside object, having regard to the long days when there will be nothing but sea and sky to look at, and even a flying-fish will be hailed with delight.

Exceptions, however, there were, and among them was the young man who had saved Brother Trigg's hat. The vessel had scarcely begun to move before he left his place among the watchers and established himself in a corner of the second-class deck.

The card attached to his deck-chair announced him to be Mr. Gerald Blake, and this, in law and fact, was his name. But, so far as his Christian name went, it was seldom indeed that he had the pleasure of hearing it. Indeed, a great-aunt, now dead, who objected to abbreviations on principle, was the only person who had ever used it. All the other members of his family called him Gery; and among the many grudges which this young man bore to fate, this ill-treatment of his Christian name was not omitted.

For it must be owned that Gery is a name that does not lend itself well to romance, in any case; and the tone in which his family pronounced it was, as a rule, the reverse of romantic. It was but too often coupled with the significant word "again." "Gery again!" Consie Blake would exclaim to her sister, when the dining-room door had banged behind the master of the house, at the end of a breakfast during which everything and everybody had been stormed at, from the toast to the school-boy son who had injudiciously chosen that opportunity to ask for a tip. And Cissie would sigh, "I hate the very sight of foreign paper! I wonder if he has started back yet, or whether papa will be able to pass him on. Not that it will

make much difference to us, in the end, either. Consie, when you are ready, we had better go up and look at those old tennis-frocks, and see what *can* be done with them. Because it will be no use asking for any more, with Gery to be set going again."

The Blakes' was a motherless household, or there could scarcely fail to have been one voice which had inflections tender enough to make even the name of Gery sound melodious. As it was, there is no doubt that, so far as his own family was concerned, Mr. Gerald Blake belonged to the number of the Great Unappreciated.

So it came to pass that this afternoon he was feeling himself a profoundly injured man. Nobody had pressed him to stay; nobody had cried when he went; and his father had flatly refused to give him a first-class passage out. This was the crown of his wrongs; and as his looks of languid disgust wandered round the second-class deck, he felt everything human he beheld to be alien to him.

Before long even the poor consolation of comparative solitude was denied him. As they got farther out to sea, and the coast-line sank into a long stretch of insignificant cliff, his fellow-passengers came away from the side and began to establish themselves each according to his or her ideas of comfort, all about the deck. It was a full steamer, and Mr. Blake soon considered himself crowded out. With as much indignation as though he had chartered the whole vessel for himself, he went down to his cabin. As he approached it, a sound of alternate whistling and singing, which he had noticed almost from the top of the companion, became very pronounced indeed; and now he caught, with it, a sound of vigorous movement.

"Never come back no *more*, boys!
Never come back—no—more—"

Here there was a break, filled up by a rapid succession of kicks, as though a bag or portmanteau were being cleared out of the way. Then the tune was taken up in a whistle, and the accompanying movements became less marked. By this time the astonished Gerald had arrived at the conclusion that the sounds proceeded from his own cabin; he had been pausing for some seconds outside, thinking he must have mistaken the number. Now he knocked, with some temper, and went in.

"... bar up the old shop door!
We'll make some excuse
And go to—"

At this suggestive and not too well-omened point of his ditty,

the singer broke off to look round. He was a man who, at first sight, gave an impression of filling the whole cabin, and being cramped in it too.

"Oh, it's you, partner, is it?" he said, calmly. "I've been clearing round. I should judge you were a new hand at that sort of thing; don't know how to make the most of your stowing room. Eh? But now I'm through I reckon there'll be room for a little 'un—even with me in the diggings."

He laughed with a roll like thunder, or the bass notes of a bull. And, in spite of his disgust at discovering what kind of a companion fate had provided him with, Gerald Blake, looking round the cabin, could not withhold a certain grudging admiration.

Blake had left every available surface littered all over with his own belongings. He was perfectly aware that he would not have the cabin to himself; in point of fact, he was the intruder, the one berth having been taken before he applied for his passage at all. But that was a mere detail, which could have no practical bearing on his own arrangements. Now, wherever the things might have been put to (and experience soon convinced him that all really needful articles were wonderfully close at hand) the place had been made not only clear, but tidy—with that rough sort of tidiness which every practical man comes to at last, however little moral beauty he may see in it in the abstract.

Of course, Blake felt that his companion had been taking a liberty. Still, a liberty that saved him trouble was an offence he could condone. He muttered something which might have been either apologies or thanks, and began to search for his match-box among the knick-knacks which had been bestowed in the rack above his berth. It should be unnecessary to say that all his belongings were in a style equally unsuited to his surroundings and to his means. This last mattered comparatively little, as none of them had been paid for. The bills for them were still among the pleasant surprises he had prepared to keep his memory green among his relatives. And for all this, he really could not help wondering, with a sort of mental smirk, what impression the general style of his possessions had made on one whom he was pleased to consider a simple-natured barbarian. If he could only have known what exceedingly correct and accurate conclusions the simple-natured barbarian had, in fact, drawn from his observations, he would certainly have felt less satisfied, and might have been more discreet.

"You see, I've pegged out your claim at the top," said the man.

"I always take the bottom berth ; it's no joke for the neighborhood when I try a jump at close quarters."

"I should think you would find it close quarters even for sleeping, let alone jumping," said Gerald, condescendingly.

"Well, there's not so much room as there is on the veld, no doubt," said the other. "I've known better quarters, and I've known worse."

"Of course. When one knocks about the world much, one must expect to have something to put up with. I've always found it so myself, anyway."

Under their overhanging brows the eyes of his companion gleamed with a grim humor. But all he said was,

"That's so."

He put a few finishing touches to his arrangements.

"Now that's done," he said, "suppose we come and liquor up to the success of the partnership?"

Gerald had not the slightest inclination to do so, but secretly he was sick already of his own society, and he assented.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN his companion drew himself up with a stretch and a shake, from stooping over his baggage, Gerald could see what a singularly powerful-looking man he was. His height, though, in reality, above the average even of tall men, scarcely attracted special notice, so well was it carried off by the breadth of his shoulders and the massiveness of his limbs. In age he seemed between forty and fifty. His hair—very thick and shaggy, and hanging over his brow in a way suggestive of the mane of a bison—was already touched with gray. But most likely this was the result of those years of exposure to sun and storm which had given him much of the weather-beaten appearance of a sailor or a gypsy. The lower part of his face was partly concealed by a short but thick beard.

They went into the saloon and gave their orders at the bar. The elder man signed his name on the order-card in a handwriting which Gerald could see half across the counter, "T. Westoby"; a hand which the amount of character it suggested alone saved from being stigmatized as that of one entirely illiterate. They sat down

by one of the tables; Gerald took up a wine-card and began listlessly looking through it.

"They don't half understand this sort of thing on this line," he said, with a sort of superior resignation. "What is one to do in the tropics? On the American lines they do at least understand drinks."

"You've been in America, then," said Westoby. "And what sort of a location is that, now, to your thinking?"

"A beastly hole," said Gerald. And having thus summarily disposed of that continent, he ceased.

"And what part might you happen to have been in?"

"All parts, more or less: San Francisco, Canada, Tennessee, Florida. It's all the same—one gigantic swindle. I just wish the parents and guardians who are always being caught by advertisements for openings, could know the real state of the case. There's nothing to be done out there; nothing at all."

"Some fellows seem to have made their pile, too," suggested his companion.

"That may be. But, you see, there are things a gentleman can't quite do."

He spoke in a tone so penetrated with outraged morality that it cannot be supposed that work was among the things he implied to be impossible for a gentleman. Nevertheless, the man opposite him seemed but little impressed.

"Well! it's likely I don't understand much about that," he said, with a grin, which suggested an honest pride in his ignorance. "They had a saying in my parts, when I was a young shaver, that 'a cat in mittens catches no mice'; and I reckon there's truth in it, in more ways than one. As for the Loblolly Land where buttered rolls drop off the trees into your mouth, and pigs run about ready roasted, with knives and forks sticking in their backs—*that*, it's true, I never found, and, what's more, I never expect to find it; and, what's more still, I'm blessed if I want to."

"Yet I have heard of fortunes being almost picked up, so to say, out in Africa," said Gerald. He had none of Westoby's objection to an earthly Paradise.

It was well in his companion's heart to say, "Oh! have you? you precious young fool! Picked up! Neither there nor anywhere, and don't you make any mistake about it."

But though Westoby undoubtedly possessed a fine, warm, not to say explosive, temper of his own, it was really a very great deal

more under his control than it was popularly supposed to be. Seldom, indeed, did he let it loose without calculation.

"There *are* folks born with a silver spoon in their mouths, no doubt," he said, but not encouragingly. Nevertheless, his watchful, twinkling eyes never lost touch of Gerald's face, and their expression was neither that of his manner nor of his voice. "But it isn't every one that is, and those that aren't must work; there's no way out of it. Do you know what that silver spoon is?"

"I suppose it is the same as to say that a man has luck," said Gerald, with a sigh which was meant as a slap at Fate, who had denied it to him.

"You've not hit it this time," said Westoby. "Maybe that's what folks mostly mean by it, but it wasn't my meaning; luck's a notion I never held much by myself, that's a fact. It never did anything for me, nor I never asked it; and, as for other chaps—those that I've heard swear at it might mostly have begun cursing nearer home, and I never knew one bless it yet. Other chaps praised it up for him, but the lucky dog himself began nearer home too. No, what I meant was something nobody has two minds about the good of; and *if* a chap has it. But there's not much going, you bet."

"What is it, then?" asked Gerald. His attempt to conceal a reluctant curiosity could scarcely have deceived very much duller eyes than those gray ones, alert in ambush.

"Capital, partner, a few hundred pounds of capital; that's the silver spoon for those parts. But, as I said, it's precious scarce; none the worse for that, though, for those who have it."

Gerald made no answer. Westoby filled up a moment of acute watchfulness by a prolonged draught from the tumbler before him. He set it down with a sort of jovial clang, and threw himself back in his chair till it creaked beneath the weight of his huge limbs.

"Not so bad, after all, to my mind," he said, drawing his hand across his mouth. "When you've served as many years' apprenticeship to Cape Smoke and Boer Tobacco as I have, there's precious little in that line of bread-and-butter you'll care to quarrel with."

Gerald's face expressed all the disgust his companion could have hoped.

"You don't seem to fancy the notion," he went on. "Do you know how long it has been with me? Man and boy, I've been working up and down the country nine-and-twenty years. And now I'm bound to keep on, whether I like it or no; that sort of life takes the shape out of a man for anything else."

"I don't see why it need if it doesn't go on too long," said Gerald, with a touch of nervousness.

"Maybe not; but that's just where it is—it always *does* last too long. I knew a young chap," he went on slowly—he was drawing upon his imagination, but it sounded the same as though it had been upon his memory—"I knew a young chap, about ten years ago; as likely a young fellow he was, when he came out, as you could see. His guv'nor was rather a big boss at home; but they didn't hit it off together, somehow, and one day there was a big thing in rows, and this chap had to quit; so he came out to our parts. He wasn't one to shirk, he'd turn his hand to anything. When I knew him he was serving in a store by Vryburg; I was trading up that way then, and it was the place I used to bring my show to. You may have fancied I'm not much of a judge of what your lot calls good form; but I do know good breed in a chap when I see it, and I saw it in this one—then."

He paused before the last word, just long enough to force attention.

"Why not?" said Gerald, sharply. "I should suppose that would be as easy a thing to see as it would be hard to get rid of."

"Hard to get rid of, you think," repeated Westoby. To Gerald his tone sounded sardonic. "Easier than you think for. Three years after I came across that chap again. He was a private in the mounted police. That's not a step up; he hadn't taken it because it was either, you bet. But there's steps lower, too."

"One needn't take them."

"Oh! of course not. And, likely, it was just this chap's own choice that brought him to be a dock-laborer, by Cape Town, with a nigger missus and a lot of piebald picaninnies in a hovel. Some fellows throw up the sponge so soon; yet I shouldn't have thought he was that sort, either."

If the implied moral of this anecdote slightly contradicted the speaker's previously announced theories, the hearer was in no mood to be critical. For in his heart he felt too well that, for him, to bully Fortune was as morally impossible as to succumb to her was fatally easy. He had proved it, indeed, already; but the full possibility of horror which lay in defeat had never been so crudely put before him as now.

"You said just now that with a little capital—" Gerald broke off.

"Oh! that, of course," said Westoby. But in the easy indiffer-

ence of his assent, merely abstract in tone, he said more plainly than in words, "But what's the good of that to poor devils like you and me?"

He rose and shook himself; it was a habit with him after having been seated; and probably arose from the constraint consequent on a posture so unnatural to him.

"If you care to see the last of the old country," he said, "we should be just about sighting Portland now. No more land after that till Madeira." And thrusting his hands into his pockets he lounged out of the saloon and went on deck. There he attached himself to an old colonial acquaintance whom he had discovered among the passengers. It was not his policy to favor Gerald with a longer interview just then.

Gerald had little enough wish for one. He came and stood among the others, and his eyes were fixed mechanically upon the far blue promontory fading every moment, but his thoughts were elsewhere. Not far off, Mattie, divided between the sentiment due to the old life and the excitement breathing from the new, withdrew her tearful gaze now and again from the shore to dart curious glances in his direction, feeling very much as if she were guilty of looking about her at meeting. She noticed how handsome he was, and she looked again and noticed how nicely his clothes fitted. And then she looked back at Portland, and cried afresh to think how frivolous she was; and then, somehow, she fell to wondering how *he* felt, and before she was aware she had stolen another glance. She decided that he looked melancholy, as indeed he did. Handsome and melancholy: how many girls ask more, at nineteen, of a hero of romance?

Gerald Blake himself, that afternoon, felt anything rather than heroic. His mind was filled with two images. One was that of the legendary aristocrat in the novel. Gerald did not know that he was legendary; and it is true that he was fairly typical of a certain class of failures. There had been enough general truth in the narrative to give a grim substantiality to this otherwise shadowy bogie. Gerald had seen too much of the world to have been frightened by an impossible legend, and he had been seriously frightened by this one.

The other image, which lighted up the night of his depression with a gleam of hope, was that of the five hundred pounds which his father had solemnly assured him should be the last farthing that would ever again be spent on what his daughters called "setting Gery going again." Gerald had told himself that he disbelieved the

threat; that when this sum had gone the way of many previous sums (a way known clearly to no man, not even to himself), more would be forthcoming again as, spite of grumbling, it had been before. But he had not really convinced himself. He knew how greatly the estate had deteriorated in value; he knew that his sisters were come to marriageable age, that two of his brothers at least must soon be, in their turn, started in life, and that these two were by no means the whole of the family. It occurred to him—as an injury, of course, but still as a fact—that under these circumstances it was probable that a man really might refuse to start any given one of his children more than five times over; and, when driven to accuracy, this was the number of new beginnings to which Gerald was obliged to own.

The question, therefore, became a pressing one, how to invest his capital so as to combine the maximum of profit with the minimum of work. A person who starts on this principle is not likely to be coldly calculating as to the matter of security. Sometimes such an one has luck, and they call him a brilliant financier; sometimes he has not, and they call him a fool. But whether laurel-wreath or cap-and-bells awaited Gerald at the goal remained to be proved. Abstract morality apart, perhaps it was not altogether ill for the temporal interests of this puppet, that it was Westoby who already held the strings which were to regulate his dancing. For Westoby, at least, was not a fool, and to an accommodating tool might even be—not just, for what rights has a tool that he can claim?—but not altogether ungenerous.

Meanwhile, Gerald was making up his mind as to how, most diplomatically, he could make use of him. He still believed that this colossal barbarian offered a favorable field for a discreet young man to *exploiter*. There are people who owe a great deal more to Nature for what she has done for them in the way of physique, than at all appears on the surface.

To judge by appearances, Westoby and his friend were enjoying themselves. The friend was an ordinary-looking person, offering no special points for description; it cannot even be said exactly how it was that he managed to give the impression of being a man not even so much as on the outskirts of respectable society. In fact, his antecedents, beyond the fact that he was of Dutch extraction, were as lost in mystery as those of Westoby himself, and his experiences had been little less varied. But for the last few years he had kept a canteen in Dutoitspan, and not in one of the most reputable

quarters even of that; the profits were presumably satisfactory, since they had enabled him more than once already to proceed to Europe, on business best known to himself.

The two stood leaning with their backs against the bulwarks on the emptier side of the ship, that furthest from the land. They were speaking Cape Dutch—the native language of the one man, and to the other probably more really natural than his own—and in the interests of the general public this was just as well. Because the remarks and anecdotes which set Westoby's broad shoulders shaking with his deep laughter were not of the most graceful nature—to say the very least. Their like may be heard around out-span fires on the veld or in the barrack-like dormitory of some up-country farm, where passing wagon-drivers and *voor-loopers* shake down together for the night; and persons of average respectability, who have been privileged to overhear such conversation, freely admit that it beggars description. Neither does it invite it.

Presently there was a pause. The subject, whatever it may have been, was exhausted for the present; Westoby began looking round the deck, taking stock of the passengers.

"You like missionaries, don't you, *Baas*?" said his companion with a grin, following the direction of his eyes. Among all the various kinds of what he called "niggers," among whom his lot had at any time been cast, Westoby was the "*Baas*," *par excellence*. Other masters off and on, according to the fortunes of service, this man, though he should never be seen among them again, was *Baas* still and forever. It was the witness of their instincts to a fact their intellects could never have formulated; that with him mastery was no accident of position, but something inherent in his nature. His associates had picked up the nickname and adopted it. "You like missionaries, I know. There's a very pretty thing in that sort over there."

Westoby looked a moment, and then smiled grimly.

"*She* won't do much harm," he said. "If they were all her sort, they might come in shoals, for me. But they wouldn't come at all. I'd like to see this one's face the first time she rubs up against a nigger; I reckon black-beetles would be out of it for making her jump! It's not long she'll trouble these parts."

"She'll be bound to; they're going out to be married."

"Who's the other?"

"That one."

Westoby looked, and looked again; and this time he did not speak

at all, but his face changed very curiously. There is a certain transfiguration which marks the moment of the birth of a sudden love; this change marked the birth of an antipathy. At the moment when he caught sight of her, Sarah was just turning full towards him. The last faint shadow of land was fading upon the western horizon; away from the old world, away from all the past, she turned to look eastward and seaward, and, though the tears were still heavy on her lashes, her face as she looked was radiant with the light which it had worn in the parlor in Castlegate three weeks before.

And it was that light which Westoby met in her eyes, and he hated her. Hated her because—plain, prim, narrow-minded woman that she was, in no wise clever, and by nature meek rather than masterful—he yet felt, with that intuition of character which was among the greatest of the gifts he had abused, that he was in the presence of a spiritual power. Westoby would not have been the clever man he was if he had underrated power of this kind. He would have been even a worse man, perhaps, than he was if he could have sneered at instead of hating it.

His companion looked at him with a certain surprise. He knew, of course, that the very idea of a missionary acted upon Westoby like a red rag on a bull, but he had scarcely expected to produce so much visible effect.

"What's up, Baas?" he said. "You look riled. Have you had any special row with that lot lately?"

Westoby faced round furiously.

"I don't know what you would call a row. I've had some d—d cheek from one, if that's what you mean, yes."

"Well, I guess there isn't much odds," said the other with a grin. "What was it about?"

"That's no concern of any one's."

"That means a girl, then."

"You're precious sharp, aren't you?" sneered Westoby. "Anything you don't know ain't much worth knowing, is it? As it happens, it just wasn't."

"Not this time?" said the other, quite unmoved. "Well, what was his saintship's name, anyway?"

"I don't know his name, nor his address, and it's the best streak of luck he ever hit that I don't, too." He paused a moment; he almost seemed to be struggling with his temper, and so used was he to command it from motives of policy that, perhaps, from sheer force of habit, he really was. But this time it was too much for him.

The veins in his forehead swelled; his face—literally darkened—became distorted with rage. He brought down one huge, clenched fist upon the palm of the other hand, and kept it there, grinding and crushing as though his enemy lay below.

"A d—d sanctimonious young prig of a nigger mongrel to give himself airs with me! A fellow with nigger written all over his canting face to dare to stand up to so much as the lowest white in creation!"

He broke off with an oath. When he spoke again, he had recovered much of his self-command, but his tone was none the pleasanter.

"But you look to yourself, my boy," he said. "You put your trust in your white face and your smooth hair and your nice moral polish, don't you? And you think that a chap with all those points is safe enough, even if he has a dash of nigger blood which shows when he turns up the whites of his pious eyes—and a bit when he doesn't, too—don't you?" He laughed a little. "Look to yourself, my boy," he said again; "take my advice, and look to yourself! For I'll bet my bottom dollar that, one fine day or another, you'll find enough to do."

CHAPTER V

A TROPICAL night, gemmed with stars; the wide waste of black water broken by gleaming tracts of phosphorescent fire, dashed, under the sides of the vessel, into a spectral splendor of whiteness, out of which a shattered spray of palest green-gold light leaped and fell continually. A red-gold glow from the lamp at the binnacle was comfortably human without being intrusive; another such ray streamed up the companion from the lighted saloon. Somewhere out of the gloom came soft music; a couple of travelling Italian musicians—harp and violin—were rehearsing their stock of tunes. It was not an extensive one, nor was the tone of their instruments faultless. Yet heard thus faintly, through the constant rush of waters, in the starlit darkness, amid the awful spaces of the sea, there was a harmony in the sounds not their own; the music put a crown upon the night.

Sarah Bowman sat in a corner of the second-class deck, and watched the glimmering sea-fires and the stars. She was doing noth-

ing, and she was one of those rare women who can sit unoccupied with dignity; her strength manifested itself in this power of repose.

She sat and thought; and, though she was not given to dreaming, her thoughts this night, floating with the floating of the waves in the unreal luminous gloom, passed insensibly into dreams. Dreamlike seemed the life of the past, infinitely far already, for it was one to which there could be no return. And if the past was dreamlike, what could be said of the future? Fancy will speak, even where experience gives no hint. It might be that Sarah was preparing disappointments for herself; a nature like hers is foredoomed to disappointment. On the other hand, she was safeguarded from despair by reason at once of humility and of the curiously maternal character of her affections. Mother-love knows no end to hope.

As she sat there, shadowy forms were passing up and down before her—some singly, more in pairs. They passed with a murmuring sound of talk and laughter, but it was not for some time that any of these wandering voices had power to break her dream. Then, clear to her above all other sounds, came a little silvery giggle, and she was awake at once.

It really was a giggle; an irritating sound, as a rule, redeemed, in this instance, by a certain childlikeness in the manner of it and by its native musicalness, but not redeemed to Sarah's ears by anything at all. She bent a little forward through the darkness; there was anxiety in her face and some perplexity. Resting with their backs against the bulwarks stood a young man and a girl. Sarah would have had no need to see their faces to know who they were, but as it happened they were standing just beneath a hanging lantern, and the light fell full upon them.

The girl, of course, was Mattie. A red scarf was thrown loosely over her black hair, ruffled, about the temples, by the breeze; her eyes flashed in the lamplight; her pearly teeth gleamed between the red lines of her laughter-parted lips. Her companion was a young man of about seven-and-twenty; he was as picturesque in his way as Mattie was in hers—fair-haired, yet with a face so browned with sun and wind that his really beautiful, pathetic Irish gray eyes looked out of it like a surprise. These eyes, in fact, worked for him much better than he could have done for himself; for Mr. Gerald Blake was not really a very ingenious or resourceful young man, even in the art of flirtation. But, thanks to his manner and his looks, and to a certain indescribable quality of pathos which he could put into his voice, nobody ever found this out.

They seemed to have chosen their position purposely, for Gerald had hold of Mattie's hand, and was examining the palm. He was tall, and she was singularly small; consequently, he had to bend down considerably in order to make out the lines by the faint light. He, thus bowing over the little hand, she, with her pretty head averted for a moment in mock embarrassment, they made a very picturesque group, no doubt; but the effect of it was, to say the least, confidential.

Sarah had scarcely more than taken it in, when she became aware of some one watching it with her. She became aware of this not by any sight or sound of the watcher, but by a consciousness of eyes somewhere behind her in the darkness, fixed in the same direction as her own. She looked round instinctively. As she did so there was a laugh, and some one said,

"Pretty, ain't it, Miss Bowman?"

Sarah rose and turned; a faint color came into her face and died away again.

"Oh! come," the voice went on, "you're never going to cut in and spoil it all, are you? Don't, now, miss, for my sake. Because it makes me feel real good all over, to see young folks enjoying themselves—bless their little hearts! And I know you'd like to make me feel good, now wouldn't you? Eh? You can't settle? Shall I toss up for it, then? Heads, you go for their souls; tails, you go for mine. The old gentleman's bound to lose on it somewhere, you see, so there can't be any harm."

He took some coin out of his pocket, and began tossing it up and down, catching it in one of his great hands.

"You needn't trouble yourself, Mr. Westoby," said Sarah, in a voice that shook a little. "You, at least, can have neither part nor lot in such matters, as long as you sit in the seat of the scornful."

They stood facing each other; in the semi-darkness the mere mass of Westoby's huge person seemed to loom ponderously, like something portentous, mythical; while Sarah's pale face gleamed whiter, like a spirit's. Defiance, mutual inevitable antagonism, was in every tone of their voices—in every line of their attitude. The matter ostensibly in dispute was practically unimportant; there was no need of any definite cause of quarrel where mere contact sufficed to produce a discord.

When she had spoken, Westoby laughed again.

"That's no go," he said. "You don't really think that'll go down with me? No; I'm only a poor devil of a white, not a dear, sweet,

lost soul of a nigger. That's the English of it, you know: 'none but niggers need apply.'"

Sarah was silent; she could not answer, yet she would not go. To do so would have seemed to her a confession of the weakness of her cause, such as no torture should wring from her—and Westoby's tone and language did cause her real suffering. She remained standing as before, but Westoby seated himself on the bench behind hers, crossed his gigantic arms upon the back, and talked on.

"Now, what I look at," he said, "is the confounded waste of it all. 'Tisn't as if niggers *had* souls. You think they have, I know; but you see that's just where you make a mistake. Trust a chap that's lived among 'em, year in, year out, for more years than you've been in the world at all. Now, I'll just tell you a rum thing about one of those fellows, a thing that happened to myself."

Here he discovered that something had so far distracted Sarah's thoughts that no pleasure was likely to be got out of even the most horrifying narrative. Her attention was elsewhere, and looking to see on what it was fixed, he saw that Mattie and her companion were moving away. Gerald seemed to be arguing some point, reproaching, insisting; the girl was defending herself coquettishly. They disappeared into the darker shadow at the end of the deck; at the same moment Westoby rose slowly.

"There's something on your mind just now, I reckon," he said, "something that wants thinking out. But if I forget to tell you that story some day, just you remind me, will you? Because it's one likely to give no end of wrinkles to any one that's going to have to do with that lot; put you up to no end of dodges."

He strolled away in the direction taken by the other two. Sarah breathed more freely; but she could not bring herself to sit down again in a spot over which Westoby's insolent spirit still seemed to brood. The very night was desecrated to her; she gathered up her shawl and went below. A faint sobbing wail drew her to one of the cabins; some baby, left asleep by its mother, had woken up to terrifying solitude. Sarah found her way to it, and while she held it in her arms, hushing and soothing, felt peace and protection wrapping round herself.

Sarah had little knowledge of the world. Her experience of its wickedness, indeed, was absolutely theoretical, derived exclusively from tracts. Now, there is no dearth of the most startling kind of sinners in this class of literature. They use habitually the most dreadful language—not specified; they commit, or have commit-

ted, the most appalling crimes—also left to the imagination. But in reality they are men of straw, set up to give a cheap victory to the minister or the district-visitor; a victory of which the ease is disguised from the simple-minded reader by the bluster of the adversary.

Therefore Westoby was a great surprise, even a terror, to Sarah. There was a startling vigor and life-likeness about him which gave a sickly tinge of unreality to the ruffians of her literary experience. She knew him to be coarse, and suspected him to be brutal. To her, at least, he never opened his lips without in some way outraging her most sacred sensibilities. Of the possible violence of his temper she thought she knew something, and little guessed how ineffective was the sample which he had purposely allowed her to see—enough, and too much for her, that she had then overheard him making use of expressions which were not represented by blanks, though they might have been with advantage.

Even his physical characteristics were something of a horror to her. His size; the untamed animal vigor which betrayed itself in every movement; his very capacities for food and drink, both of which were in full proportion to the exceptional character of his physique; his voice, harsh by nature and sonorous with the resonance born of constant speaking in the open air; all these things were repulsive to her; they affected her almost as an impropriety. For Sarah was not merely, to all intents and purposes, convent-bred; she had the very spirit of the cloister. She was not consciously an ascetic, any more than she would have been, of set determination, a celibate, because she had been taught that celibacy and asceticism were popish, and, consequently, immoral. But living outwardly the social life, she was, in reality, far less in touch with the world, as generally understood, than many a little convent-bred novice who thinks of it with an awful but delicious curiosity as of something wicked, indeed, and not to be meddled with on any account, but yet exquisitely interesting. Sarah took absolutely no interest in it; she had no need to turn away her eyes from its seductions. She beheld them, and they left her cold.

The baby's mother returned, grateful and apologetic. Sarah gave up her charge and returned to the saloon. It was empty; the open air had greater attractions on a night in the tropics. She sat down, and took up some sewing. In a minute or two there was a sound of light hurrying feet, and Mattie came hastily along the passage, and threw herself into a seat beside Sarah. The girl's eyes

were dancing with excitement; it seemed as though she could scarcely restrain the exuberance of life which thrilled through every fibre of her being. She was always more or less in this condition now.

"Have you been enjoying yourself, dear?" said Sarah, with a conscientious attempt at sympathy; though, indeed, Mattie had long since got far beyond her comprehension.

"Oh, yes," said Mattie; but the details of her enjoyment she kept to herself.

Whatever they were, they seemed to amuse her, for after meditating upon them in silence for a moment, she began to giggle again. She let one little hand fall upon the table in a would-be accidental manner, palm uppermost, and examined it furtively, which led to dimpling and more giggling. Perhaps she hoped, after all, that Sarah would notice this proceeding, and question her further; if so, she was disappointed. Failing, then, in this move, she began to fail a little in temper also. She took up a piece of the stuff at which Sarah was sewing, and threw it down, impatiently.

"I wonder if there were ever any girls in the world that had such a set of wedding-clothes as we have!" she exclaimed. "It was scarcely worth while to come six thousand miles if our lives are to be as much like the old, old thing as our dresses are."

"I don't think you need be afraid of that."

"Why not? I am afraid of it; that it will be only different by being worse."

"Mattie, dear—"

"And if it is, I sha'n't be able to bear it, so there now! They haven't done right by us; no, they haven't. If they had wanted us not to learn better, they should have sent us in the hold with the packages—that's all we are. It's spiteful, that's what I call it, *spiteful*, to let us know how—how nice—things—are just for three weeks, and then tell us we're never to have any more fun for the rest of our lives. Miss Grover's a cat! And it's a burning shame. They all say so."

"Who says these things?" asked Sarah, quietly.

"I say them," she said, defiantly, "because I think them."

"If my little Mattie really does think them now, somebody must have been putting them into her head."

"He didn't," said Mattie, hastily. "Well, then, everybody says so. If you weren't always going about with your head full of niggers—"

"Don't use that word, Mattie; it isn't right."

"Mr. Westoby says it. He knows a lot about them."

Sarah was silent.

"Well, if you were like other people you'd have heard for yourself. Everybody pities us; both of us, not only me. People think a deal of you, too. Mr. Blake told me—"

"For shame, Mattie! It isn't like you, it isn't doing right by such a bringing up as you've had, to go borrowing words one minute from a profane scoffer like Mr. Westoby—"

"I only said 'nigger,' that's not swearing, I suppose. As to that, I don't like him any better than you do; a great clumsy teasing bear! Go along with him!"

Nothing in Westoby's manner to Sarah could at all have helped her to understand why Mattie should here also punctuate with a giggle. But then Westoby was a person of varied accomplishments.

"It would be very sad and shocking if you did really go by what a man like that says, indeed," said Sarah. "And as for the other person—well! I hope he is a well-meaning young man, but I see nothing that could make one think him a sincere Christian, and he is always about with Mr. Westoby."

"He's getting Mr. Westoby to put him up to a thing or two about the country; that's all."

"Oh!"

"You always did dislike poor Mr. Gerald!"

"Who?"

"Well, Mr. Blake, then. Oh, dear; you're just too proper to live!"

"If I didn't dislike him before," said Sarah, roused to real indignation, "you've been saying enough to make me now. If anybody's not doing right by you, Mattie, it's him. If that's your fine gentleman, I hope neither you nor I will ever see any more of them! Making a decent young woman the talk of the ship! one that's as good as married, too! Sitting about in corners with her in the dark for hours; stroking and squeezing her hands over his silly fortune-telling games—and they're wicked, too; walking about with—yes, I did see him, Mattie—with his arm round her waist, whispering—Mattie, what did he want?"

"Nothing," said Mattie. She had borne the recital of Gerald's enormities pretty coolly; if not without a pout, at least with one which was near akin to a smile. But now she turned scarlet to the

roots of her hair. She put up her hand, with a conscious gesture, ruffling about the loose locks. Sarah followed the movement mechanically; all at once she saw that they did not cluster quite as usual about the pretty brow. And she got rather white.

"Mattie," she said, a little breathlessly. "Oh, my dear, don't say that. Mr. Blake asked you for a lock of your hair, and he took it."

"No," said Mattie, passionately. "No, he didn't take it. He asked me for it—yes; and I gave it him. Would you like to know some more? He asked me for a kiss, and I gave him that, too. Yes, I did!" She looked defiantly at Sarah for some two seconds; then she covered her face with her hands and began to cry. Sarah knelt down beside her, and put her arms round her waist.

"My dear! Oh, my poor dear! I've been a bad mother to you," she said, remorsefully.

But Mattie shook herself free, jumped up, and ran away. She was nearly at the foot of the companion when she suddenly stumbled, and fell with a cry of pain. She tried to rise before Sarah could get to her, but fell back.

"My ankle!" she said, rather faintly. "I slipped on one of those horrid children's marbles. I'm afraid it is a sprain."

Sarah took her up bodily in her arms and carried her to the cabin, petting and pitying her as if she were indeed a little child; *her* little child, hurt in body and soul, for whose double hurt her own mother-heart was very sore. For in that last passionate outburst, in those sudden tears, she had guessed, by mere virtue of their common womanhood, at something which till now had, perhaps, been a secret even to Mattie herself.

It is not unlikely that, for the time being, her trouble was the worse of the two. Mattie, after all, was very much of a child still. Her ankle, though not seriously hurt, pained a good deal, and she bore pain with difficulty; she felt feverish and wretched, and cried a good deal, and she begged Sarah's pardon, and said she knew this was a judgment—and felt rather proud, at bottom, of having so much individual interest in Providence. It made her feel like a girl in a book.

The bodily hurt was not serious. Had the heart-wound been as slight? Sarah had no means of guessing. To all appearance it was; but the elder girl recognizing, in full humility, that she had mismanaged and misunderstood this affair hitherto, felt no confi-

dence in her own judgment any more. One thing at least was well: Mattie's ankle kept her a prisoner for the few remaining days of the voyage. She and Gerald scarcely met, never alone, till the day when the sight of Table Mountain gave him something far too practical to think about to leave any inclination for flirting.

CHAPTER VI

BENEATH a sky without a cloud the little settlement of Beulah lay glittering in the sunshine of a September morning. All around, like the bulwarks of eternal peace, the mountains stood between it and the outer world. A sort of austere purity was in their very barrenness; denuded of all other vesture, the atmosphere itself clothed them with beauty, laying velvet touches down every shadowy fold—veiling with infinite, well-nigh palpable blueness, the recesses of distant kloofs, turning to a vision-like gleam of opal some far-off ledge of rock smitten with sunlight.

Across the surrounding veld, flower-enamelled now like the plains of Paradise, groups of colored folk in their holiday clothes were making their way towards the village: servants, mostly, belonging to the outlying farms, their masters and mistresses meanwhile jogging along at a sling-trot over the sandy tracks, in white or ochre hooded Cape carts, drawn by little, gaunt, ill-groomed horses. And these were all concentrating upon the plain whitewashed building inside its square enclosure bordered with gum-trees, which was the meeting-house of the settlement. In the enclosure a grinning native, of pronounced Hottentot type, was ringing the bell, hung in a sort of little frame with an arched top, whitewashed like the chapel itself. The brisk, tuneless clank, unmusical though it was, united with the gay dresses and the little crowd of carts to give something of a Sunday or festal effect to the whole, though it was not Sunday.

There was one person, however, in Beulah at that moment on whom it made no such effect. The sounds of the bell were borne upon the still air into a room in the minister's house, where a young man was dressing, and they made him more nervous than he was already—which was unnecessary. He hurried on his preparations in an increase of flurry, which made him more helpless every moment. Almost with the first stroke a shuffling scuffle of feet came

along the passage; then a voice outside (he had taken the precaution to lock the door):

"Baas, Baas Samuel, August Hendriks, he begin to ring the bell!"

"I HEAR!"

Another voice:

"And, Baas, I see the brides; they are coming just now. I see the cart by the church-door."

Then yet another voice, female this time, and in Cape Dutch:

"You lie!" (This is the graceful Africander form of contradiction. The newly-arrived European finds a certain crudity in it; but as no offence is ever taken, it is presumable that none is meant.) "You lie! That's Van Renen's cart, from Welgelegen. They're not come out yet, Baas. But the minister, he say—"

"Oh, dear! get out, all of you, this minute," shouted the exasperated victim. "How can a fellow do anything, with you worrying round like that? Do you hear me? *Voetzaak!*"

Two or three delighted sniggers and the scuffling was taken up again, and died in the distance. The comparative release from worry so far quieted the young man that he was able to get on rather better, and soon finished his preparations. Under no circumstances could Samuel Arkwright have been a distinguished-looking young man, but it would be quite unjust to say that he generally looked so atrociously common as he did now. His clothes, in whose newness he was obviously ill at ease, were such, for style and cut, as might be seen adorning a dummy in a tailor's window at Worcester, or the Paarl; and, even so, they fitted the dummy better than they fitted him. Devoid of the slightest taste in dress, he never looked so well as when he had given no attention to the subject at all; so soon as he began to think about it—to select, he was lost. His tie and his pin were equally offensive. Of the latter, it is true, he was only so far guilty as that he saw nothing wrong with it; for it had been a wedding-present from the cricket-club of the settlement, of which he was the very popular captain, so that he was, perhaps, bound to display it on this occasion. His light hair had by nature a curl above the forehead; this he had, with infinite pains, contrived to erect into a sort of cockatoo-crest, resembling a style held fashionable for babies forty or fifty years ago. But the rakish swagger of the effect was indescribable.

He was really, almost painfully, nervous, and in him nervousness always intensified vulgarity; under stress of it his speech, his car-

riage, his whole manner would become fairly aggressive. For the rest, when left as nature made him, he was a pleasant-looking young man enough, with singularly honest blue eyes, and a face which was the adequate reflex of a kindly and simple, but not silly, soul.

Just as he was adding some finishing touches, in which the horrors of the general effect were concentrated and resumed, a step of a different character to the last set came to the door. Samuel hastily unlocked it and threw it open, to admit his adoptive father, the head and chief minister of the settlement, the Reverend Joseph Glasse.

"Sam, my dear boy," he began, "aren't you dressed? It is just time to be off. Runciman has been ready this half-hour."

"How is the unhappy man?" asked Samuel, with solemn interest. "Did he make a good breakfast, and attend to the exhortations of the chaplain? Will he walk with a firm step, do you think? Don't guess I can." Here he turned his toes in and his knees out, in a manner peculiar to the more gifted among comic singers, and staggered a step or two towards the minister. "It's no go," he said, despairingly; "everybody's bound to see what a blue funk this sufferer is in."

"Sam, you won't play the fool now, will you?" implored the minister. "You must remember it is really a serious thing." The young man's face changed. It was not a face which could ever look really depressed, but as near as it was possible to come to that it did.

"I wish I didn't remember it," he said, ruefully. "Oh, dad, why couldn't they leave a poor duffer alone, that only asked that of them, and never did anybody any harm in all his little games?"

"It was thought best," said the minister, feebly. "And you shouldn't look at it so, Sam. I'm sure there was never any reflection—I should say— You know there couldn't be. And when you see that the application was made on behalf of Jesse Runciman at the same time—"

"All right, dad," said the young man. "Never you mind for this child. I was only chaffing a bit. Though I don't say that I'm very keen on this job; of course, a chap knows he's got to be taken in and done for some time or other, but he likes a chance to *think* he's doing it himself, anyway. And he's not in such a precious hurry, even for that."

"Don't make up your mind to dislike it, there's a dear lad," urged the minister. In very truth he was as little set upon the

arrangement as Sam himself, but it was equally against duty and common-sense to admit this. "It's not right, you know; and so foolish—now. And you ought to consider the young woman, too."

"Why, you don't think I should be playing it quite so low down as to go taking the change out of *her*, do you?" said Sam, with a touch of honest indignation. His face, ruddy already with polish and nervousness, got redder still for a moment. But the offence passed almost with the words; he was nothing if not good-tempered, also few kinsmen by blood so thoroughly understood and loved each other as this unrelated pair. He threw one arm across the minister's shoulder, with a sort of slap to disguise any possible sentiment. "Never you fear for me, old boy," he said. "I know lots of chaps that have found marriage a thundering good job, and if it depends on me, I'll make it one too. I'll think of how you and the old lady used to pull together, and I'll do my level best to make our turn-out as neat a thing as yours was. Honor bright! You just keep your spirits up, now. We'll all three have high old times together yet, see if we don't. The more the merrier, you know."

"You're a good lad, Sam," said the minister—and added under his breath, "and if she doesn't see it, she'll—" then hastily broke off the thread of his soliloquy with some shame. "Now, my boy, we really must be off. We have to go round by the school to pick up Runciman."

Sam stuck on a hat which fully equalled the rest of his costume. He cast one last hasty look at the glass. "Oh, lor'," he sighed.

If the minister did hear this sigh, he was too wise to take any notice of it. They went out together; the cart was waiting in front of the oak-tree-shaded stoep. Sam got in. The servants had gone on to the chapel, so the minister stayed to lock the door. He lingered a moment over the simple action, with a touch, perhaps, of the feeling of Old Timothy, in the ballad,

"The key I must take, since my Ellen is dead."

It was not quite so bad as that, certainly; and he had, in fact, taken the key often enough before. Yet there was, after all, a sort of finality about the act this time, a sense of coming change which, to Joseph Glasse, at least, was a sense of coming loss; for he had got to that age at which there are few things of which men do not say, "The old is better." When that door should be unlocked again, the accustomed, happy life, *en garçon*, would be over for those two forever. And it had suited the old man very well. In

the ten years of his widowhood he had slipped back into much of that ease in which a man is said to live when he is single. Sam, too, was very dear to him, and his love, unknown to himself, had something in it of the jealousy natural to old age. But now the decree had gone forth that Sam must "range himself," and the minister felt that many little harmless ways of his own, grown pleasant by long custom, might probably have to "range themselves" also. And now, too, one was to come whom, in merest duty, Sam would be bound to try, at least, to put first in his affections. The minister was a good man, and so far from dissimulating this duty, he had even urged it upon the bridegroom, with many secret vows of self-effacement. But it was not in human nature that he should feel much delight at the prospect. To say he would gain a daughter rather than lose a son might be consolatory in the abstract, but, practically, he did not want a daughter.

In a very few minutes they stopped before the school-house, low and white, and thatched like the rest, with large sash windows, each small square pane heavily framed in white. Like all the other houses of any pretension, it was half hidden by oak-trees, now in the first freshness of spring leaf. The stoppage was not for long. On the brick stoep, where tins of portulacas placed along the edge made splashes and trails of blazing color—magenta, crimson, blood-red—the school-master was waiting for them.

From his childhood the first thing that strangers used to notice about Jesse Runciman was the beauty of his eyes; and, at the next look, some, at least, would fall to wondering whether they really were beautiful, after all. In a certain sense they were: large and dark and very soft, with a sort of bluish iridescent tint about the whites that gave a certain character to the whole. They were intelligent, too; they were good; and yet they were not comfortable; they were haunted at once with a hint of incompleteness and of possibilities. Such eyes in kind, though not in degree, as might have met the wanderer among the glades round Circe's palace; pathetic inexpressibly with some fading memory of the human; yet dreadful, too, even in the gentlest, with the look of the brute nature that had overpowered it. The curious thing about them, in this instance, was that this peculiarity, noticeable chiefly when the face was in repose, seemed to contradict the very face itself. That expressed intelligence, energy, and will, and, dominating these, a certain passionate spirituality. Yet even here there was a nameless something that was to be felt rather than to be seen—something

not ascribable to any one feature, yet subtly affecting the whole; something of a type neither English nor Dutch—in point of fact, not European at all.

“That’s right, Runciman,” cried the minister. “Ready, of course! What did I tell you, Sam? That lazy fellow nearly made us all late, Runciman, and there would have been a pretty state of things—the brides waiting for the bridegrooms, eh?”

The young man had already got in and seated himself behind, beside Sam, who greeted him with the tender of a limp hand and a hollow groan. Perhaps it was intended for sympathy; but the other took no notice, and Sam subsided.

It seemed to him that the cart had scarcely got in motion before it stopped again, this time at the gate of the enclosure; and now the ordeal by eye was no longer to be avoided. The minister fustily, Runciman as in a dream, and Sam with a frightful swagger, passed up the path and entered the chapel. That was crowded already; but the colored people, who formed the bulk of the congregation, were too well drilled to venture on much demonstration in those precincts, and the general decorum was most edifying. The two or three families of outsiders did, indeed, stare and nod and whisper as the young men passed; but the kindly shelter of one of the few high pews reserved in a sort of transept for the families of the elders and deacons soon received them, and poor Sam was in comparative comfort. The native, like the school-boy, is better without such accommodation, and the main body of the building had been judiciously fitted with forms.

The head deacon’s wife struck up a lively Moody and Sankey tune on the harmonium, by way of a wedding-march. It was to this lady, fundamentally, that the whole credit of the present situation was due; and she thought it very creditable, and put a certain pious swing of triumph into the lilting vulgar air, with its refrain painfully suggestive of a nigger melody. It happened to be the tune of a temperance hymn, and every soul in the chapel knew the words belonging to it; but not one, either, was in the least troubled by this slight want of appropriateness. But they had not long to listen to it, for a moment later the two brides came in, and there was little attention to spare for music.

Considering the experiences through which they had been hurried since their arrival in Cape Town three days before, it was little wonder that the girls looked chiefly dazed. If there was any difference noticeable in their expression it was that Mattie seemed scared,

and Sarah distressed. It should be reckoned high praise that they did not lose their heads entirely. Miss Grover might well have been proud, could she have seen them, of the sort of mechanical correctness with which they went through their parts; it was a triumph of sheer discipline over nerves.

The service began. By degrees Mattie lost much of her look of terrified bewilderment. After all, to be married, to be that culminating point of interest to the female fancy—a bride—this was something. Perhaps nothing in the world is ever quite so perfect as it might by some possibility be, and circumstances were conceivable that might have added satisfaction even to this situation. But on the whole Mattie was rather elate.

When, on the previous afternoon, she had learned from the head deacon's wife, in the course of a rapid biography, that Jesse Runciman had colored blood in his veins (his grandmother, the daughter of a Horanna chief, had been brought up on an up-country mission-station; his great-grandfather had remained a typical old savage to the day of his death), she certainly had not been pleased. Yet the announcement had affected her much less than might have been expected. She was then still in a state of mere confusion. That constitutional horror of the colored races which Westoby had predicted in her had, indeed, asserted itself from the first moment she landed; but she had not yet had time to analyze the sensations produced in her—little capable, indeed, of such analysis under any circumstances. The fact, therefore, represented little to her beyond a rather disagreeable abstract idea. Add to this that Mattie was rather chameleon-like in the matter of her opinions: they took their color very much from that in which they were viewed by the person who presented them to her. If it had been put before her as Westoby, for example, might have put it, it is probable that even at the eleventh hour she would have found courage to refuse a union which she could easily have been led to think of as nothing less than revolting. But so far from this she soon found that her informant considered it a matter of no practical importance at all, absolutely powerless to affect Runciman's claims to social or racial equality with any one. She was further told that among colonials (Mrs. Davis was English), "bless you, my dear, half of 'em have it; nobody thinks anything of a little thing like that—can't afford to. There's many got it a deal nearer and stronger than him, but so long as it don't *show* too much, you understand, who'd trouble?"

No one certainly could deny that Jesse fulfilled this obligation.

Mattie, least of all, utterly ignorant of national types, could have been expected to trace anything of his lineage in his face, nor in fact did she do so. She thought him, on the whole, decidedly good-looking; not so good-looking, perhaps, as— But she filled up the blank only with a sigh; she was going to be a good girl henceforward; all that was done with, and never to be thought of any more.

But before Mattie had found encouragement, Sarah had found peace. Once the service had begun, the familiar language of prayer and exhortation produced a quieting effect. In all this strange, unhomelike land, this was the first spot where she had felt at home; the language spoken here, at least, was that, more than any other, familiar to her heart. Even the peculiar rising and sinking inflection of the voice helped to comfort her; she closed her eyes and tried to think she was back in the little brick chapel at Marston; that beside her was the row of round, fresh, solemn faces of the smaller girls who had been her special charge; that the voice was that of the old minister; that he was saying— Here she brought herself back, with shame, for she felt that she had not indeed heard anything of what was being said.

When she did listen it is idle to deny that she was disappointed. The general opinion of the congregation was that the minister's closing prayer was singularly wanting in unction—and very likely it was. As he doled out one perfunctory phrase after another, Sarah tried to draw, with these empty vessels, at least from her own spiritual wells. She tried, and failed; for, indeed, she had come to a fountain sealed as yet. Of marriage in a spiritual light, in any light save as a necessary condition to her work, she had never thought; and till it should be more stimulatingly put before her than was being done now, she never would so think, for it met no want in her nature. For support? she could stand alone; for the satisfying of any void in her heart? there was no such void, for there she bore, mother-like, every young and weak and suffering soul within her cognizance.

The poor old minister, having done his duty with regard to time at least, if he could not wring from his heart a consent to do it with enthusiasm, wound up his prayer; there was a movement among the congregation, one or two stood up. And then, suddenly, they were stopped.

From the first, Jesse Runciman had been in a strange state of abstraction. He had gone through everything, had stood, spoken,

moved, with something of the unconscious accuracy of one magnetized. And now, when his voice came unexpectedly upon the pause, it made a silence of all other sounds throughout the chapel.

Rising and falling, in the strange conventional modulations of the voice of extempore prayer among the sects, this voice was yet suggestive of nothing less than of conventions. The well-kept, substantial building, the common-place congregation, all the comfortable little vulgarities of modern civilization, were struck out of keeping by it. It cut right through to nature; was it, perhaps, too near? Who can tell? For the strange contradiction between face and eyes was here too. The voice was the voice of passions more primitive, more emphatic, than might always submit with patience to such restraints as suffice for ordinary men; the words were not merely words of prayer, but almost of mysticism. Judged by these, the man might have been pure spirit.

He prayed that the union here begun on earth might be but the means of a closer union with heaven, a spiritual ladder upon which angels might ascend and descend more easily. He prayed that each, reverencing in the other not only the handiwork, but the predestinating Providence of the Creator, who, by strange paths and through the mighty waters, had brought together, by no carnal tie, those who came but to be the instruments of His glory, might so live as became beings privileged to be the subjects of so special and manifest an interposition. That living, after the flesh, the married life, their life, after the spirit, might be already as that of the angels which are in heaven; that each in this path helping on the other, they might go on together from glory to glory, till, wedded souls on earth, they might still find their rightful place among the virgin souls, who, above the earth, follow forever the Beloved who feedeth among the lilies.

Spiritual enough! And one nature which was really little else, which could never know or guess at such awful possibilities of conflict as lay in the other, recognized its kinship. To Sarah, as he prayed, a whole new world of duties, privileges, aspirations, was opened. For the first time she thoroughly realized that, foremost among all her other works and duties would be the work and duty of a wife. Yet, under the spell of that exalted ideal, the revelation brought her no disappointment, no sense even of inferiority in dignity of mission; her imagination was left free to soar towards heights scarcely less spiritually exalted than those of her missionary aspirations.

As the school-master concluded his prayer, Sarah turned slightly and looked towards her husband. It was a strange look; there was as little in it of shyness as there was of love, there was not even any natural curiosity as to this all but unknown personality—seen but once before for some brief half-hour—which was henceforth united to her own. But utter loyalty was in that look, reverence was in it; some such reverence as Milton's Eve displays for Adam, but Eve has a suspicion of sentimentality about her devotion, and of sentiment in Sarah there was absolutely no trace at all. Allowing for difference of sex, it was much more the look which a follower of Ignatius Loyola might cast upon the general of his order.

And at the moment she looked, poor Sam was fumbling on the floor for his glove which he had dropped, and muttering slangy ejaculations under his breath.

CHAPTER VII

It was a December afternoon, two or three weeks before Christmas. Last year, at this time, a little girl, one among a dull-uniformed regiment, dressed in an ill-cut brown stuff frock, her pretty little hands disfigured with chilblains, had been sitting sewing in a cold, bare room in which the fire at one end had been little more than a mockery; there had been grayness and cold without, white calico and cold within; there had been rule of the strictest, austerities, and repression.

To-day the same girl was sitting out of doors on the brick bench at one end of the stoep of the school-house. All around her was, if no luxury of art, at least a luxury of nature: a glowing prodigality of sunshine, a wealth of foliage, a blaze of color—stately gold of the sunflowers, burning scarlet of poinsettia and hibiscus; while, cooler and more delicate, the soft green of the garden hedge was thickly starred with the blue-gray clusters of the plumbago. As for personal appearance she looked prettier than ever in her white gown and shady hat; both had formed part of her wedding outfit, but both had been remodelled into a suggestion of something very different to the spirit which had guided the original design.

Yet Mattie Williams had looked happy and good; Mattie Runciman could not be honestly said to look either. She sat with her

chin resting on her hand; her eyes were fixed on a pink-paper-covered periodical which lay open on her knee. There was a vague discontent in her face; the look of a spoiled child whom a cruel kindness, by condemning it to satiety, has debarred from satisfaction. She turned over the pages of the paper now and then, but it was listlessly. In fact, she had been reading for two hours that afternoon already, and even her mental palate, little educated though it was, began to feel cloyed with the sickly sweetness of the sentiment, her imagination to feel jaded with following the galvanized bounds of an artificial passion. Nevertheless, a girl of her stamp has time to sustain a good deal of damage from literature of this class before she gives in; and, though there was not a page in the journal which the most prudish could have stigmatized as immoral, there is no doubt that Mattie was none the better for her afternoon's reading, nor for the many afternoons and—too often—mornings that had preceded it.

She was secretly glad to be interrupted by the sound of the click of the garden gate; when she saw Sarah coming up the path she did not indeed run to meet her, but she did throw down the paper and brighten up for a moment till she was more like the Mattie of six months before—Sarah's child-sister, who in all her little waywardnesses, her half-humorous rebellions, had never lost the fundamental desire to do right, to be, in her degree, more like her friend.

Sarah came on with a quiet haste which conveyed no idea of hurry. She wore a gray gown; physically, it did not become her, but with her that was a matter which no one ever observed. In all other respects it was in thorough harmony with her appearance. For always, now, Sarah Arkwright seemed to be walking in shadow—a holy shadow, indeed, for it was that of a great patience, but a shadow for all that.

Her face brightened scarcely less than her friend's as she stooped to kiss her.

"Isn't it time for school to be out?" she said. "Here is a poor woman in great trouble. Her husband is lying very sick in an old hut beyond Tygerfontein; I fear he is at the point to die, and now his conscience writes bitter things against him, and he is afraid. So Mr. Glasse sent me to ask Mr. Runciman to go up with the woman and see what can be done for this poor soul."

"Why doesn't he go himself?" asked Mattie. The question was natural, if not remarkable for tact; but there was something too

much in the tone of a disposition to find fault with everything, for no better reason than that it was not something else.

Sarah colored slightly; she paused; when she did speak it was so very gently as to be noticeable even in her who was always gentle.

"He was there this morning; if he could have done any more good, I'm sure you know that he would have gone now, and again and again. But for such work as this it has not pleased the Lord to prepare him. Let every man abide in his own calling wherein he is called. There are those who are bidden to go up to the battle, and those who are bidden to tarry by the stuff; we are told in the Word that one portion shall be to both alike."

Yet how had all her yearnings, all her enthusiasm for years, been for the battle and its heroes!

"Well, I dare say Jesse will go," said Mattie, carelessly; "you can go in and see. But I think if people are always expecting him to do minister's work, he ought to get minister's pay too. Oh, Sarah, dear, my dear old grannie, don't *you* look at me like that! I didn't mean it—I didn't mean anything. Oh! you would be sorry for me, if you knew how cross and wicked I always feel now—and I can't think why! Sarah, darling, scold me and forgive me. I would *like* to be scolded."

"I never used to do much of that, my Mattie, did I?" said Sarah.

Mattie made no answer; she laid her head against her friend's arm, and held her hand fondlingly between her own; and then, slowly, her lip began to quiver in a childish, piteous way, and a mist to soften the brightness of her quick black eyes.

"No; don't scold me, Sarah—comfort me," she said.

"What do *you* want comforting about, dearie?" said Sarah. She did not know that she had made an emphasis.

"I—don't know," said Mattie. "Never mind; don't talk; only sit and hold me so. That is so quiet and comfortable and good."

They sat side by side in silence after that, till from inside the house a chorus of plaintive, shrill, yet not wholly unmusical voices broke out in a hymn.

"There," said Mattie, "that's the end. Jesse will be out directly."

"I will go in, I think," said Sarah. "I want to see Killian Smidt before he goes home. Sam gave me a message for him about the younger boys' cricket match."

She went in. Mattie was left alone. The woman whom Sarah had brought with her had remained standing at the gate. Seeing her protectress enter the house, she came in and advanced as far as the stoep. There she stopped uncertainly. "Good-day, meesis," she said, with a painfully abject grin.

She was not a favored specimen of an unattractive race—the colored vagrant: half loafer, half odd-jobber; always on trek from one squatting-place to another. The rags which she wore, or rather had cast upon her, had had all color drenched and scorched and weather-tormented out of them long ago. They had turned one dull, sickly, uniform brown; only here and there, on the skirt, square patches of various-patterned print stood out startling in their comparative freshness. Over her head she wore, kerchief fashion, a cloth, once white, now gray with dirt; from a sort of bundle at her back protruded something round and black and woolly: the head of a baby. The creature could not have been above four months old; in such a position its weakly neck could not properly support the weight of the head, which lolled helplessly from side to side over the edge of the rags. Even at this age its little hands were clutching each a piece of dried snock, with sucking which its flat monkey-face was shiny and sticky.

As for the odors which stole upon the air—! There was, first, that of the dried snock aforesaid, of which the smallest piece seems equal to sampling effectively a whole bloater factory. Added to this was that indescribable one perhaps peculiar to the great unwashed of South Africa, and which appears to be due, more or less, to the strange, pungent scent of the smoke from the roots and scrub they use for firing. And as if these were not enough, they were, alas! unmistakably reinforced by the fumes of the worst description of Cape brandy.

It cannot be denied that she was repulsive to every sense of body and mind—this maudlin, degraded, servile creature, as near an approach to the lowest type of savage as a civilized community will anyhow tolerate. But the way in which Mattie shrank from her betrayed a repugnance beyond anything that the same amount of misery and degradation could have excited in her at home. It was a horror differing not merely in degree but in kind. She had been sitting with her eyes closed after Sarah had left her; when she opened them at the sound of the woman's voice, there came into them not disgust only, but fear. The tramp's shadow fell across the stoep upon her feet and on the skirts of her gown. As

though, without even looking, she had felt this, she drew back out of it into the sunshine with a movement as instinctive as that with which she might have recoiled from a snake. There was in the movement something of the almost physical horror that might be excited by some sudden awful metamorphosis of a brute creation into human form. To Mattie, in very truth, even the civilized native was doubtfully of her own species; the uncivilized one she simply did not feel to be human at all. There is no arguing with a feeling of this kind; but there may be a struggle against it, and, so far, Mattie had been at least trying, however feebly, to fight. But she was getting morally blacker week by week, almost day by day.

She was sitting thus helplessly looking at the woman, when Jesse Runciman came quickly out of the house. At the door he turned and called back to some one inside.

"You will come, too," he said, "there may be work for you. I will wait till you have arranged your business."

Then he came towards the others.

"Is this the woman Mrs. Arkwright tells me about?" he asked.

"Yes; but I don't know what she wants up here, and I wish you'd send her away. I'm quite sure she's drunk," said Mattie, piteously.

Runciman cast one glance upon the miserable creature below. It was enough to convince him that Mattie was not far wrong.

"You hear that?" he said, sternly, in Dutch. "And you know it is true."

"*Nij, Baas*," whined the woman. She put one corner of her rags into her eyes and began to whimper in a feeble, drivelling-way.

"Lies won't make it any better," he said, sharply. "Well, go back, and say I am coming. Go."

She made a kind of cringing courtesy, mumbling gratitude, turned, and went.

He watched her down the path and out at the gate.

"She will scarcely get there," he muttered, with angry contempt.

He turned away, and came up to Mattie.

"Did she vex you, my dear?" he said.

The voice could scarcely have been recognized for that of the same man.

"You know I'm afraid of tipsy people," said Mattie. "Of course, I didn't like it; but it doesn't signify."

He sat down beside her, and took her hand and stroked it, and then lifted it to his lips and kissed the little fingers one by one with a strange passion, and pressed it again, and seemed as though he could not look at her or fondle her enough. And his soft eyes certainly did not gain in spirituality the while.

"You heard I have to go out now?" he said, presently. "And Johnnie Steyn has been saying his grandmother is very low to-day. Wouldn't you, maybe, look in and have a chat with her? It would please her ever so much. You'll do it, won't you?"

Mattie leaned back wearily in her corner, and pressed her hand to her brow.

"It is such a hot walk," she sighed, "and so stuffy when you get there! And those big cups of sweet coffee she makes one have always made me ill, and I don't know what to say to her, nor do I understand half she says to me; and I have the headache so badly already."

"Don't trouble then, my dear," he said at once; "you mustn't think of it."

Mattie did not look grateful, but she did not retract her refusal.

"Is the pain very bad?" he asked. He drew her head down upon his breast, and held her close, kissing her on the temples again and again, smoothing back the pretty stray locks, and murmuring pity and endearment as he bent over her. They sat in a position scarcely different from that in which she had been sitting with Sarah just before; yet there was no appearance that Mattie found any of those qualities in his embrace which she had commended in Sarah's. Nevertheless, she remained passive; she did not speak—only sighed.

"What will you do for your head, dear?" said Jesse. "Will you go in and lie down, or will you be better sitting out here in the air? Have you anything to amuse yourself with? What is this?"

He picked up the illustrated journal she had been reading. Mattie seemed to think some defence was necessary.

"Anna Marais lent it me to try some cooking recipes out of it," she said, rather quickly.

Jesse was fluttering over the pages rather contemptuously. His conscience would not have allowed him to spend ten minutes over it himself. Of any other reader in the world he would have asked, indignantly, how a being with an immortal soul and an account to give could waste time and thought over such trash; but having, in the first days of his marriage, weighed Mattie's soul in his own balances

and found it wanting, as judged by that standard, it may be seriously questioned whether he any longer practically believed that she had a soul at all. Certainly, for a long time past he had not been going the way to increase his belief in that part of her. Now he only said,

"And does it amuse you, sweet?"

Even Mattie seemed a little surprised.

"I don't know; well, then—no!" she exclaimed, impatiently.

He said no more. For a minute or two longer they sat as before, he caressing, she submitting, and then Sarah came out. Jesse stood up on the instant.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," said Sarah. "It took me longer than I thought to settle things with Killian. We did not seem able to understand each other very well. I'm afraid Sam chose a stupid messenger," she added, and smiled faintly. "I've tried to learn the meaning of it all, but I seem to have made a poor business of it."

"I sent the woman on before, to say I was coming," said Jesse. His eyes, his voice were both changed again; braced, as it were, and standing at attention. "I thought that we should not need her to show us the way, as you have been there already, and the man might be looking for her." He turned to Mattie. "I shall try to be back by tea-time," he said. "But if I should be late, don't wait for me, and don't sit up; I can't say whether I may not have to stay all night."

He bent and kissed her—reasonably, this time—and went away. He put her aside, as he might have put aside any other indulgence; he left her, as a man might leave his easy-chair or his meal at the call of duty, without one instant's shadow of hesitation, but as something which simply had no connection with any but the animal life. He seemed to have effected a complete divorce between the two sides of his nature; thus far had three months of matrimony brought him from the aspirations of his wedding-day.

Yet he had not himself begun to suspect, nor was there any one in Beulah with sufficient discernment to tell him, that he was morally in a less satisfactory condition than he had been six months before. Perhaps, even had any possessed the discernment they would scarcely have felt the right to speak. It was Jesse Runciman's real and great misfortune that, hitherto, he had never met his spiritual superior. This, indeed, he had now found in Sarah. But she had too much humility, and he, as yet, too little, for either to recognize

the position in which each should by rights have stood towards the other. At present, he lorded it over her, beneath whose footstool he might yet come to be glad to be allowed to sit.

As soon as Jesse was out of sight, Mattie suddenly snatched up her magazine from the bench beside her, and flung it right across the stoep. Then she stood a moment, and for all the sunshine was so hot she shivered. She turned slowly and went into the house.

CHAPTER VIII

RUNCIMAN and Sarah set out at a quick pace, and had soon passed through the village. They spoke little, and what they did say was but trivial. Now and then a passing laborer made a sort of shambling swerve of head and shoulders towards the school-master, with a "Good-afternoon, Baas." They never touch their hats, but the peculiar movement they affect is so like a cringe that the omission can scarcely be ascribed to any haughty spirit of independence. Now and then a child from among the groups still straggling home from school would silently contrive to attract Sarah's attention by a broad, shy grin; then she would smile and call it gently by its name, and it would trot on quite satisfied.

They came to the wagon-shops, where Sam Arkwright, who superintended that department of the industries of the settlement, hot, cheerful, and practical, was working like a Briton himself, and by dint of example and a good-tempered but very free use of the richest vernacular was contriving also to get more real work out of his men than the head of any other department could quite compass. Sarah turned her head towards the open doors, and though she saw nothing, and heard but the beat of the hammers and the strident rush of planes and saws, she smiled a little, tenderly, and the patient shadow lightened somewhat from her eyes.

"I am glad there are so many happy people in the world," she said.

Perhaps her gentle voice may have had the faintest tinge of pathos, a voice as of one who was learning to look on at happiness from the outside; but Runciman answered as though he had rebuked a complaint.

"A contented mind is a continual feast," he said, briefly. "That

is a secret of happiness within the reach of us all, and within our duties, too."

"You are right," she said. "Thank you."

They went on a few paces, and then he stopped and said,

"It will be a long walk and a lonely one; had you not better go into the shops and ask your husband to come for you if you should not be able to get back before dark?"

For him this was almost consideration and common-sense, but it was not this that made Sarah look surprised.

"There's no need," she said. "I'll be back long before then."

"How can you tell that?" he asked, brusquely. "You can't know beforehand what work there may be for you to do."

"I must be back by tea-time, anyway," she said. "Mr. Glasse always likes me to be in by that, and it's only right by my husband that I should be. I'll go with you now, because I have something to take that was promised this morning, but I don't mean to stay."

He frowned.

"The curse was upon Meroz," he said, sternly, "for no other reason than this—that it came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty. And do you remember who He has said are not worthy of Him? You have had spiritual gifts intrusted to you above the general run; don't forget, Sarah Arkwright, that of you will be asked the more."

She looked troubled, but she answered firmly,

"There can't be anything wanted that you aren't better fitted and clearer called to do than I. I don't know why my conscience doesn't speak with yours in this matter; but it is my own I shall have to answer for, after all."

Perhaps this struck him as reasonable, for he said no more. He always honestly tried to be just, though a mind less judicial by nature probably never existed. His plain duty towards his scholars had imposed this upon him, and, so far, his present vocation was good for him—as anything was that obliged him to balance and moderation.

They walked on again in silence. Presently they passed the head deacon's house. On the stoep Mrs. Davis was sitting; she had a large basket of mending by her side, and a half-darned sock on her hand. But that hand lay helplessly in her lap, and her head drooped low upon her breast—for the afternoon was hot, and Mrs. Davis was of comfortable proportions, and so it came to pass that for the last quarter of an hour she had been fast asleep in her Madeira chair.

This woman had been the prime mover in the committing of a great wickedness, so far as one couple at least was concerned; a sin no less against the husband than against the wife. But though she possessed a conscience of not less than average sensibility, this thing had never troubled it at all; nor to her dying day would it so trouble her or any of the others concerned in the affair. They had all acted for the best, and by prescription. There is so much harm done in the world for which really no one can be held morally responsible; yet the evil works as cruelly as though the calculations of the most refined malice had gone to its devising.

When they had got through the village, Sarah became guide. Their way led first by sandy tracks across the veld; then, through a rickety gate in a stone wall, they entered the grassy enclosure of a farm—the last in the valley.

Turning down a rough path between vineyards, whose grapes were already tinged with purple, they went down to a grove of mingled oak and pine, and crossed by a plank bridge the stream, whose springs, a little farther up among the mountains, gave its name to the farm—Tygerfontein; springs round which, within the memory of the farmer himself, the fiery eyes and supple, shadowy forms of the mountain leopards had been seen moving in the dusk. Once beyond this, even the tracks disappeared; they made their way as best they could among the clumps of dry, bristly scrub, always skirting the base of the hills, towards a hollow a mile or so beyond the farm, where a couple of oak-trees made a landmark for them.

For a long time neither had said a word. What manner of quiet communings Sarah might have been holding with her soul there was nothing in her face to show; but it was pretty evident that Jesse Runciman was getting worked up. It is but the commonest justice to state the fact in this way; he was not in the least working himself up; to attain any conceivable height of excitement he had never required anything further than just to let himself go.

With Jesse, temperance in any form was most markedly the work of grace; his nature, in all its branches, and whether for good or evil, tended always and in everything to excess. Spiritually, whenever he was not *tête montée* he was plunged in some slough of despond, so genuine and so full of horrors that he used really to suffer in bodily health on these occasions. But, as a general rule, he was in the former condition; a great deal more so than was at all safe. This had been the case even in the old days, at a time when he used to be far more on his guard than ever he was now; when a fight—

often absolutely physical—with every instinct of his lower nature had, to a certain extent, kept him in subjection all round. But in these last months his exaltation had been more continuous, more noticeable than ever. At the weekly prayer-meetings, in particular, his eloquence—and such as it was, it had always been that of the heart, it was no artificial production of the intellect—often fairly quickened to a passing enthusiasm a not very impressive assembly; so greatly had it gained in warmth, that any possible loss in elevation was inappreciable. He himself certainly was conscious of none; he was quite satisfied with the effect, and the cause he did not suspect; it certainly did not occur to him that this phenomenon was but one sign, among others, that he was breaking bounds in every direction.

Quite suddenly, now, he broke silence.

"Do you know what it is," he said, "to wrestle for a soul?"

He did not wait her answer, but went on.

"I have wrestled for one, once. It was all one night; every power of hell was loose that night, I think, and all contending for the possession. And they had a leader; I saw him, I heard him. Yes! if ever the devil spoke in the likeness of a man I heard him do it then. All night long; we were three, in a native hut; it was dark, dark—and a great red glow of fire, we could see each other by it—yet it gave no light, not one ray at all—dead, black darkness all round it, not touched at all. It was like hell."

He shuddered and stopped.

"But it was not that," said Sarah. And now unconsciously her voice took the soothing tone she might have used to a child. She could not help it; his horror was so evident, so simple. "Not that; because for the poor soul you were speaking of there was still place for repentance. You can tell me, can't you, that he found peace; that joy came in the morning?"

"Yes," he said. But he spoke absently, and he did not go on. The sudden workings of a great dread were visible in every feature, in the nervous movements of his hands. All the agonies which he was preparing to encounter in another, he was going through at that moment in his own person.

"Tell me about that poor man," said Sarah, gently, when he still did not speak.

He collected himself with an effort, passing his hand across his brow; it was cold and damp.

"It was about the drink," he said. "The man—a native he was—had been a mad drunkard; it was a possession. He had been re-

claimed a few months before, but it was awful suffering often, even still. Awful! I never thought, I never could have believed . . .” His tone, which had been quieter, began to swell to its wild note again. “And then—*he* came in; I don’t know who he was, I never saw or heard of him before or since. He came in—out of the night—from walking to and fro upon the earth, I suppose. He threw himself down before the fire, and then he took out a great flask of that accursed stuff and offered it to us. And so it began.”

“He couldn’t have known!”

“He knew, because I told him. For the matter of that it seems the two had met before. And then I heard him swear to himself in English, that he would soon put a stop to that. He said he had no notion of blue-ribbon niggers.”

“An Englishman?”

“I suppose so. But to the man he spoke in Sesutu; he spoke it like a native, and as for what he said—I told you the tempter himself must have taught him that. O God, that night! We could not go; he had set himself in front of the opening of the hut, and he was a giant among men—I could not have made him stir a limb—the native was a powerful man, but his will was not whole in this matter; how could one expect it? So he sat there, drinking slowly, on and off, in our sight. That poor wretch! I put my arms round him, and I hid his face against me as I knelt; he was such a strong man that, just with his shuddering, he nearly bore me down. Now and then he cried out; it was as if the evil spirit tare him.”

He paused; he was deadly white, and gasping a little. Sarah’s eyes were full of tears; her face of a breathless awe.

“I don’t know how long it lasted; I don’t rightly know what we said or did—any of us. I suppose I prayed—I must have spoken loud and for a long time, for next day my voice was almost gone, but I don’t remember a word of my own. By and by the fumes began to creep about the hut, stronger and stronger; I could do nothing to keep that from him. And then his will began to go. He twisted round his head; I saw his face—as it were, a wild beast possessed of a devil. And I felt him writhing himself away from me. All at once he gave a great yell and broke loose. The tempter was holding—it—out at arm’s length. Then, I think strength from the Lord came upon me; I wrenched it from him—I could not have unclasped one of his fingers at any other time. There was a cooking-pot upon the hearth. I dashed it against that; the fire sprang

up in a blue flare, and I saw the Englishman's face plainly. I thought, then, in another second to have grasped my crown."

"The Lord has need of you here still, brother," sobbed Sarah.

"Perhaps; I don't know. Sometimes I think that maybe it was the devil himself who then stayed the hand of his servant; that I never might get it, now, after all."

He spoke wearily; his voice was suddenly faint and weak. His passages from excitement to despondency were generally accomplished thus abruptly.

"Well," he went on, with a sigh, "it was over, at any rate. He dropped his arm all in a moment, and then, he did not even swear, he went out . . . and it was night . . . After that . . . I don't remember . . . everything went from me all at once . . . and when I came to myself . . . the day had broken . . . and the shadows fled away."

He had stopped in his walk, and stood leaning against one of the great brown boulders that were scattered sparsely about the mountain slopes. He might almost have been on the verge of some such sudden collapse as he had just indicated. It seemed a problem where he would find the nervous force necessary for a work which, even while still in imagination, had proved a strain on his resources. But to such demands as this he had, in fact, never yet proved unequal; it was the plain paths, the smooth places of life—not its dark mountains, its valleys of the shadow—that were too difficult walking for him.

They were now, indeed, but a stone's throw from the hovel—it was nothing more; the shrill insistence of a baby's cry breaking upon the hot silence of the summer afternoon came to rouse him, and as they walked on again the woman he had dismissed at the school gate came towards them; his prediction had not been verified.

"It is good that you come, Baas," she said. "He is very sick; I think he die just now. And he cry out all the time; I hear him from out there."

"Well! why are not you in with him?" asked Jesse, sharply. The school-master instinct, awakened by her delinquencies, brought him to himself, perhaps, more quickly than anything else could have done.

"I can't go in there," she whined, but doggedly. "I'm frightened for the spooks. He say they stand by the door."

Jesse strode on past her, and went into the hut. Sarah watched him disappear; then she turned to the woman with a few kind

words. Her voice was still a little tremulous, but her face was illumined with a radiance which it had not known for many a long day. She did not linger after she had unpacked her basket, but turned and went away across the sunny solitude, her heart full of voiceless thanksgivings.

When, from the dazzling glare outside, Jesse Runciman stepped into the darkness of the hovel, he was so blinded at first by the contrast that he could only guess at the sick man's position by the sound of the heavy groaning cries which came from the far corner. Even as he entered, these changed to words.

"Send him away, Baas, send him away! There he stand, by the door! He wait to see the devil catch me!"

Through the twilight of the windowless place he made out, now, the figure of a man lying on a heap of rags and old sacks. It was evident at a glance that not only his days but his hours were numbered. His eyes, fixed on what to all the world beside was vacancy, were glazing fast—even the light of terror had died out of them; his voice alone still testified that he saw and feared.

Runciman came and knelt beside him, taking hold of his hand. Before he could speak, the man cried out again,

"*Allemagtig!* save me! There he stand; his face a bit turned back to me, hanging across his shoulder, and the whites of his eyes turning up. Just so he turn and look at me when the *sjambok* cut the breath out of him!"

He clutched Runciman's hand in a grasp so powerful with terror and the last despairing struggle of life, that the short, slight fingers felt crushed in it.

Jesse looked towards the door. There was a perfect simplicity in the movement; not a sign of fear; yet, clearly, he would have been as little surprised to see that spectre as most men would have been at not seeing.

"I don't know what sin you may have done against this man," he said; "but if you have repented and confessed it, neither he nor any one else can have power to hurt you—for that, at any rate."

"It was twelve years ago; but I never tell," gasped the man; "I was frightened for the Baas. We all were frightened for him; the Kaffirs as much as me." The sense of a human presence, the contact with substantial flesh and blood, seemed to have quieted him a little. "I tell you the truth, Baas. He was not like any other man. He was too big; he could drink more, and work more, and swear worse than any man you ever see. He could tell what the boys think

when they never say anything at all ; and I know he have the devil's mark upon him. You not see it all the time ; but when he angry, then, on the left cheek, by the eye, it come out and turn—"

Jesse half started to his feet, twisting his hand away. In the moment when he had stood face to face with death, he had seen that scar himself ; and he was in the state of mind in which he was prepared to find a miraculous leading in very ordinary coincidences. Outwardly, however, he recovered himself directly ; but some sudden fear of abandonment had startled the man into a fresh paroxysm of terror.

"Go away !" he cried, hoarsely, waving off the invisible phantom with desperate hands. "It is the Baas you should go to, not to me ! I did tell a lie about you—that is true ; but he did not believe me ; he never make a mistake like that. Go to the Baas, then !" He paused a moment. "If I tell, Baas, will he go away ?" he asked, with a touch of the shrewd practicalness of the barbarian, even in supreme moments.

"I can't tell you. He will go, I suppose, when He who has opened your eyes to see him shall see fit to recall him. Maybe it is good for you that he should stay. Or do you think you deserve no punishment ? You ought to be glad if you are allowed to take it here."

"It was the Baas," he insisted, with a sort of moaning doggedness. "I must stand well with him, because he know too much. He know how I come to be all up there—the other side of the Transvaal—all among the black Kaffirs. Because *I* am a Cape boy, Baas," he said, with a faint pride.

"You are a dying man," said Runciman, shortly ; "and I wish you would remember it."

"Yes, Baas ; but I must stand well with him ; and we all know we couldn't please him better than to give him a chance against that Mission Kaffir. We had three or four there. The others were a bad lot, though ; but the Baas rather like those. When he find them out in a lie, or see one drunk on the veld, he only laugh, and—"

"This is all nothing—just excuses. Is this a time for them ? Say no more about that man. I know something of the sort of account he is likely to have to give. *You* had better prepare for your own."

"I will tell, Baas," he moaned, with renewed shuddering. "I tell you just now—and then you make him go away. There was always little things stolen from the stores."

"Was that your doing, too?"

"Not all, Baas; only a little. So, at last the Baas, he swear the first man he find out, he flog him within an inch of his life. He never flog much, that is true—he no need of that to keep us afraid—but now he say he would. So it stop for a good bit. Then one day I quarrel with that Mission Kaffir; and then the devil come into me—"

"That's better."

"I put the thing in his tent among his blankets, and then I go and tell the Baas what I find. When I tell him he look at me hard—and then I understand he know all about it. But he only say, 'Show me'; and so I come and show him, and he laugh a little. Then he call all the boys and show them, and he praise me for an honest man; but I rather he swear his worst at me. The Mission Kaffir he beg and pray, and swear he know nothing about it, but the Baas pretend he tell lies. So he tie him up at once—Baas, so sure as I die just now I never think what happen. We none of us think. He always say his heart is weak, but no one believe him; he always do his work like the rest. The Baas not believe it either, I think. So we stand there; and it was not more as twenty—thirty cuts—it is true what I tell you—the Baas was a strong man, and hit hard, but it was not more as that—when I see his eyes roll round and his head fall back. I call out, 'Stop, Baas, you make him dead!' He swear at me, for a fool and a liar, and I suppose he think he faint, for he call out, 'Stand back; I soon make him alive again!' and he strike again two or three times; but the Mission Kaffir he not call out or move any more. So the Baas throw down the whip, and he put his hand over his heart and listen a minute, and then he take some brandy and lift up his head and try to pour it down—but it all run out. And the Baas got rather white, and pull his beard a bit; and then for maybe five minutes he and we all just stand so, and nobody say any word at all—and all the time that dead Kaffir's eyes look at me. Then the Baas seem to wake up, and he shake himself a bit. He look round, and then seem like he was going to say something, and then change his mind. He only call out to give orders about taking away the body, and then he send the rest of us back to work, and he walk away. So the boys all go away very quiet, and I go away too, but that Mission Kaffir he stay by me all the time. And he stay by me now!" he shrieked out, suddenly; "he stay by me forever and ever! Baas, save me! Take him away, make him shut his eyes!

It was the Baas. Oh, no, I will say — Where are you? I can't see you, Baas. I's sorry, I's sorry; don't go away, don't leave me, don't—"

And so on for weary hours still. And Jesse Runciman, with every nerve stretched to the utmost point of tension, with his whole soul in a tumult of indignation which scarcely left room for horror, had to master himself as best he might, or to turn the nervous excitement which he was powerless to subdue to such little profit as might still be hoped for in a little-hopeful case.

It was not till past midnight that it was all over. When Jesse came out of the hovel the full moon was pouring down such floods of light as made of the season of darkness a sort of mystic day. Every leaf on the trees, every little spiky branch of scrub, could be seen plainly in this brilliant noon of night; yet it was something of an awful brightness, suggestive of things present beyond those that were revealed.

Jesse passed out of the little hollow, out from under the clear-cut, ink-black shadow of the oaks, into the open blaze of moonlight on the veld. He came to the rock where he had stood to tell Sarah the story of his encounter, and there he paused. Alone there, in the midnight, he clenched his hands, and his breath came deep and hard.

"Who is this man," he muttered, "that he should defy the armies of the living God?" He laid one hand upon the stone, as on an altar; he looked up, now he spoke aloud. "Hear me!" he said, and his voice was a great deal more like a demand than like a prayer. "Once and twice, in the body and in the spirit, have I met this Thine enemy. Set him before me yet a third time, and I will yet smite him that he shall not be able to stand, but fall under my feet. I will make him so to be had in derision that the very heathen shall laugh him to scorn, saying, 'Is this the man that made the earth to tremble?' I will make a show of him, triumphing openly," he went on, ever more and more wildly. "I will put my hook in his nose, and my bridle in his jaws . . . I will . . . Only set me face to face with him yet this one time more, and then do Thou so to me, and more also, if I turn back in that day of battle till every word be fulfilled!"

CHAPTER IX

AFTER all, Sarah got home ten minutes late. This meant that tea was nearly half an hour behind time, because, though the servant-girl knew perfectly well what the hour was, and what work belonged to it, it was not to be supposed that she was going to take any steps towards doing it without a specific order to that effect. If once the "missis" were allowed to find out that she could get any work done without her personal superintendence, what might not be the consequences in the way of "putting upon"? Therefore, Miss Rosina Cornelia Magdalena Petersen (a name so beautiful deserves to be once recorded in full), having, in spite of the most elaborate dawdling, come to the end of all the work she had actually been told to do, was now sitting by the kitchen table, wrapped in contemplation. A monk of Mount Athos, or a follower of Buddha alone can, perhaps, surpass the colored working (?) classes in their gift of contemplation. What they think about is a mystery probably never destined to solution, nor does anything ever seem to come of their thinking; but in these points, perhaps, they do not differ so markedly from their rivals as might be supposed.

Sarah's patience and quietness stood her in good stead in this branch of her domestic troubles. From ceaseless fret and irritation she was much more free than Mattie, who could never be brought to see the futility of losing temper on this point. Now she only gave the neglected order, as a matter of course, and herself hastened the preparations as much as she could.

In the parlor the two men were waiting. A year ago, in such weather, Sam would probably have sat down to tea in his shirt-sleeves, and even the minister would have adopted a costume but little less *dégagé*. Now both were dressed, as those from whom and to whom respect is due. Not a word or hint had ever been breathed upon the subject; in fact, Sarah never knew that there had once been room for such—her mere presence was a rebuke to slovenliness.

The Reverend Joseph sat looking rather demonstratively resigned; Sam, in the window-seat, his knees rather higher than his head, was

strumming fitfully on the banjo, with a running commentary. Ostensibly he was practising for some Christmas entertainment, but chiefly he was trying to distract the old man's attention from a growing grievance. Sarah moved in and out with her quiet haste, till at last she was able to say rather timidly,

"Tea is quite ready now, father."

She always gave him this title. She did not like using it, nor did he like to hear it from her; but each thought that the use of it was gratifying to the other. Explanation was scarcely possible, so though the situation would have been far more comfortable without this custom, they persevered. The only person really gratified was Sam. He indeed would have felt hurt at any more formal position being taken up, having no great sense of the occasional value of formality.

They all drew their chairs to the table, and the minister said grace with marked deliberation. Then he glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece, a briskly-ticking article in a wooden case, with a highly-colored and altogether imaginative rendering of the Castle of Chillon painted on glass underneath the dial.

"That clock was old Mrs. Hugo's wedding-present to Eliza," he remarked, with apparent irrelevance. "It was one of the things she was most pleased at getting."

Here Sam, nearly choking himself in the effort, began to whistle "My Grandfather's Clock," but the diversion was ineffectual.

"'With this beautiful clock,' she said to me, the night we put it up, 'it won't be *my* fault, Joe, if we don't live always up to the minute.' She was a woman with an amazing sense of the value of time, was Eliza."

"I'm sorry to have been so late, father," said poor Sarah. "It was stupid of me to have gone to Tygerfontein at all; I might just as well have given the basket to Mr. Runciman to take, as go myself."

"Has Runciman gone, then?" asked the minister.

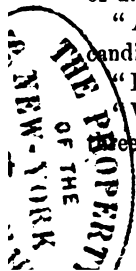
"Yes; we went together."

The minister hesitated a moment in a struggle between his sense of dignity and a natural professional curiosity. Curiosity conquered.

"And what did Runciman say to the fellow?" he asked, with candid interest.

"I don't know. I didn't go in, and I left him there."

Well, *I* couldn't make anything of him. I told him two or three times over that he couldn't possibly be seeing a ghost, because



there were no such things to see; but he wouldn't listen to reason," said the minister in rather an injured tone. "These folks never will."

Sam laughed.

"Well, Runciman wouldn't have said that, anyway," he said. "(Pass the jam, dad. Thanks.) Because he believes in ghosts himself."

"How can you talk such nonsense, Sam?" said the minister, somewhat peevishly. "A man of his education to be afraid of ghosts! You know as well as I do that the certificate he holds now would allow him to take a second-class school—not only one of these Mission affairs. And every one says he could have easily got a first-class certificate if he cared about it."

"Can't help that," maintained Sam. "But I didn't say he was afraid of ghosts; I said he believed in them. And I know he does that, because he as good as told me so himself."

"Then I wonder at the Central Committee, that's all!" said the minister, indignantly. "But it's just of a piece with all the rest. Of all the—"

"Oh, yes, dad; we all know it was the Central Committee brought in the phylloxera and ran down the price of gold shares," interrupted Sam, with good-humored impatience. This was a standing grievance of which not even his good-nature could tolerate the recital. "But as for this particular job, I don't see what harm's been done there. Runciman's a good sort, and you know it; a bit too highfalutin' for me, but you know you thought yourself in luck to get him, at the time. And you didn't ought to round on him now, dad, because he's never given you cause; and if you take my advice, you'll make the most of him while you can keep him."

"What do you mean?" asked the minister.

The freedom with which these two spoke their minds to each other, and the indifference with which they heard it, were to Sarah constant sources of amazement.

"Why, I guess the Central Committee will be for running him as minister somewhere, some day. And then you may go further for a boss for the school, and maybe fare worse."

A sudden light had come into Sarah's eyes; it was as though she had heard good news. She even began to speak, but the others did not catch the gentle words. Sarah was so little of an independent conversationalist that a remark from her, other than an answer, was never looked for.

"Do you really think that, Sam?" said the minister with some excitement. "Well, if it should be, I don't know that it would be such a bad notion—whosoever's it may be. I don't know but what he's fitter for that than for a school-master, after all."

The prospect of his own loss he seemed able to bear with very Christian disinterestedness.

"You don't think the ghosts matter for that then, dad, eh?"

"Oh, well, it's a pity, of course—a weakness, certainly a weakness in our brother. But still, perhaps, there are cases—it seems as if it might be convenient sometimes," said the minister, "if one could manage it."

"Don't fancy Runciman's a chap to put much managing into anything he does or don't do," said Sam, rather shrewdly.

The remark was innocent enough, and would naturally have been so accepted. But, unhappily, the minister had caught a glance from Sarah towards her husband—a glance of mute appeal. Now, as a matter of fact, Sam's remark had been as spontaneous as it was innocent; he had not noticed Sarah's look, being far too much absorbed in the business of the hour. But the minister thought he had, and the thought rankled.

"There's nothing so very smart in taking up a person's words that way, Sam," he said. He spoke with such unprecedented irritability that Sam, with his cup half way to his lips, fairly paused to stare, and Sarah looked miserably guilty. "If you can make out any harm I said then, you were spoiled for a lawyer, that's all."

Sam gave a long whistle, and, as ill-luck would have it, winked at Sarah, with an expression as full of meaning in appearance as it was destitute of any in fact.

"Why!" the old man went on, more hotly, "do you suppose that if I had ever thought for a minute that Runciman wasn't an honest man—"

"Oh! bother Runciman," exclaimed Sam, fervently. "I guess we've had enough of him for one while. Let's change the subject." Then, seeing the old man was really annoyed, he altered his tone. "Don't be such a precious old duffer, dad," he said, with the extra affectation of bluster with which he always disguised his more affectionate sentiments. "Who's that school-master chap that he should get up a row in this establishment? D'you suppose I'm going to break up the partnership for him? You bet I'd see him or anybody further first."

Sarah forgave him his apparent defection for its pacifying effect on the minister. But, indeed, it was not Sam's repudiation of such an obvious stalking-horse as Runciman that had soothed him. The subject was changed, and a precarious peace reigned till the end of the meal. That over, Sam took up his banjo again, and was sitting down to practise when he suddenly said,

"Oh! by the way, Sarah, did you settle that thing with Killian Smidt?"

"Yes, Sam. I stopped him just after school."

"And what did he say?"

"He said—" began Sarah, readily enough; and there she stopped. For, of the but half-comprehended message every word had slipped her memory. Far other words, far other interests, had set every long-pent-up fountain of emotion flowing, and in the rush all this matter, alien, though so dutifully cultivated, had been swept away. "He said—" she faltered again.

The minister had stopped on his way to the door. He was looking at her, and Sarah knew he was meditating Eliza, and it made her mind more blank than ever. She stood with one hand on the back of a chair, the other fidgeting with the corner of her apron. Of all the people she had ever met, the minister alone had the power to make this quiet, even-minded woman nervous. Her very conscientiousness put a weapon in his hand.

"Well, old lady," said Sam, lightly—he had not been looking at her, so that her trouble passed unobserved—"go ahead! So far, the court is entirely with you."

"Sam, I am very, very sorry. I thought I knew it quite well, but I have forgotten."

The minister coughed. Sam gave a rather disconcerted whistle.

"And I must know before the cart goes in to-morrow!" he exclaimed. Then he stood up, and saw Sarah's face. "Oh, well," he said, cheerfully, "I'll just run round and find out about it now. And don't you worry, old girl, because it really don't signify one brass farthing."

"Oh, Sam," she cried, "I will go; it's my business. I was too stupid—I had no right—I'll go directly."

But he stopped her.

"No, old lady, that you don't!" he said, positively. "You'll just stop where you are, and rest. You've been all over the shop this afternoon, in this grilling weather, and I know you've been just racing all the way back from Tygerfontein not to keep us happy-go-

lucky beggars waiting. You should have just seen our goings on before you came, that's all! Oh, lor', it was a caution! No; you don't go another walk to-day."

"Oh, Sam, I must go," she pleaded.

"You shut up, missis," was all she could obtain. "I'm your boss, you know, and you've got to mind me; and I just say you sha'n't."

He took her by the shoulders, and pushed her down into the minister's own particular chair. She protested no more; she even smiled a little. Few women would be very resentful of such despotism as this. To Sarah it was new, indeed, to be taken care of, and though she could scarcely be said, in any conventional sense, to love her husband, she liked that it should be he who did it.

Sam went off, and did not observe that the minister was still in the room.

When they were left alone he came forward. "My dear Sarah," he began.

She started up from the chair as if she had been detected in a sacrilege. He motioned her to sit down again.

"Your husband kindly wishes you to rest, my dear," he said; "and the best you can do for him *now* is to stay, as he told you."

Sarah sat down, humbly, in what might as well have been one of the red-hot chairs of the Inquisition for all the comfort she had in it any more. The minister remained standing, in an attitude suggestive of the pulpit.

"My dear Sarah," he began again, "I have a few words to say to you."

"Yes, father."

"You've got a good husband."

"Oh, father, I know!" she exclaimed, distressfully.

"And I'm bound to say that I don't think you do your duty by him."

Sarah sat with bent head, silent. She could scarcely have spoken without tears, and to cry might have seemed to reproach him. His own conscience did reproach him bitterly enough for the injustice. He went on with the more irritation.

"You always seem to be going about with your head in the clouds. It's a woman a man wants in his wife, not a—a—high-flyin' angel as this world's too good for," he said, lapsing into the vernacular as the natural man asserted itself more and more. "You don't have no feeling for what he cares for, not so much as to take a message right—and that's the way of it all! Because he ain't always on the

high horse, like some folks, that ain't to say as he's a wicked worldling, only fit to be prayin' for. It's doin' for him as is your business a deal more than the other thing. Charity begins at home, and so do duty; and if a woman does all as is wanted in that line, it's little need she'll have to be lookin' further. And now I've spoke my mind, as was *my* duty."

She controlled her voice enough to say, "I've tried, father; but I'll try harder."

But he was in no mood to be softened by a meekness which did but imbitter his sense of the wrong he was doing her.

"Well, bear it in mind," he said, ungraciously. And he left the room, trying to look as though he were pleased with himself, but, to his credit, with very poor success.

As with Jesse Runciman, so with the minister: his trial had come in a way for which he was not prepared. In forecasting the situation he had, indeed, thought himself armed at all points. He knew that he should dislike it, that it would make serious demands on his generosity and forbearance. But there had been one flaw in his calculations: secretly, he had always calculated on Sam's disliking it too. When he found that Sam, who had begun by respecting, had ended by very heartily loving his wife, he felt himself, as it were, deceived. He could not but see that the situation was altered materially for the worse, so far as he was concerned. In short, in his calculations, Sarah was to have been the third party; and he had thought the arrangement would be a nuisance even thus. Now he began to suspect that before long the third party might be himself, and it became something a great deal more serious than a nuisance.

When the minister was gone Sarah rose slowly, and kept her eyes and voice in order while she helped 'Sina to clear the table. Then she got out her work-basket, and sat down—and then thinking was too much for her. She did not actually cry, but time after time, brush them away as perseveringly and as self-reproachfully as she would, the tears gathered in her eyes.

What should she do? With everything to learn and none to teach her, she had tried her very best to do her duty; had tried to see good in the very absence of enthusiasm, to set the fairly large amount of work actually done against the want of every trace of spirituality in the doing of it. She could not lower her standard, but she had tried hard to widen her range. And it all seemed to be of no use. Her husband could do without her; her father-in-law not only could, but gladly would have done so.

Spiritual sympathy she found none; as for spiritual work, she had found more at home. She remembered Mr. Noakes's words about prayers being answered in judgment, and, wearied and harassed, suffering too, though she did not know it, from that reaction of sheer exhaustion which Jesse Runciman was capable of producing not in himself alone, she tormented herself, with a morbidness very unusual in her, as to whether something in her own case might not have deserved such chastisement.

And then, all at once, as if called up by the mere mental allusion to that scene, there rose up before her, as in a vision, every detail of the old house in Castlegate—the school-room, the garden, the parlor; and in a moment every other feeling was swallowed up in a rush of desperate home-sickness. Oh, to be back, to be back! Oh, her children! All the old life that was! If only she could hear! Perhaps in the holidays some of them would write; she knew well it would not be before. It wanted three weeks to Christmas still, then three weeks' post—nearly two months, after all, before she could hope even for a letter. Her own children that she loved! To see them all once more! to feel the imperious pull of little hands upon her gown, the little warm, wet lips upon her cheek! What were they doing? who mothered them now? Lucy and Annie, and poor Lizzie, that they feared would grow up deformed. There was one child who, in the long, dark nights of winter, used to wake up from her first sleep sobbing and screaming in paroxysms of nervous terror. Sarah used to manage to find something to do in the dormitory at that hour, and be at hand to soothe the poor little breaker of an iron law. The long, dark nights had come again; who would quiet her, who would stand between her and punishment now?

The tears overflowed at last, they dropped heavily upon her sewing; her distress was too visible to be capable of an instant's concealment. And at this moment, of all others, Sam suddenly banged into the room.

"I came back for my banjo," he said. "I thought, as I should be in those parts, I might as well drop in and give Roberts a lesson. He wants to learn and—Hulloa! old girl, what's up?"

She passed her handkerchief across her eyes in a misery of shame.

"Nothing, Sam," she said, earnestly, "nothing at all."

He pulled away the ineffectual disguise with a sort of rough kindness, and forced her round to the light.

"Come, that won't do, you know," he said. "Remember your bringing up, missis, and don't tell taradiddles. What is it now? Has anybody been badgering you?" he went on, with a sudden suspicion.

Sarah would have given anything in the world to have controlled herself then, but her spirits were just in that state when a word of kindness is fatal: she broke down into helpless sobbing.

"The guv'nor has been slanging you again, I know," he said, and his tone was so seriously annoyed that sheer dread of worse complications checked Sarah's tears.

"Sam, indeed—indeed—I am only crying because I am so stupid, because I am—"

She was about to say "home-sick"; but when he was so kind how could she hurt him by seeming to pine for a home with which he had never had one bond of interest?

"Now, can you tell me he hasn't said one blessed word to you since I went?" asked Sam.

"Sam, indeed," she pleaded again, "he said nothing but what I deserved. It was right for him to do it; I'm glad to have somebody to tell me things. I want it often and often."

"Oh! of course you do," he said, as sarcastically as he could compass—which was nothing very bitter; "you're a shocking bad lot, and it's only everybody's bounden duty to shy stones and jump upon you, ain't it?" He stooped down and kissed her, rather awkwardly. "Cheer up, old lady," he said. "Come, now, I can't leave you like this, and I've got a jolly lot to do this evening still. Cheer up, there's a good girl. Come!"

He would not go, in fact, till he had left her outwardly composed; perhaps more comfort than she quite knew herself had begun to creep even into her heart.

If she had known him better, she might have thought it ominous that he should not have said another word about the minister, either in defence or in reprobation. But she was spared the addition to her troubles, which a comprehension of the meaning of this fact would have supplied.

Indeed, Sam was really angry, too angry to let off his annoyance in mere swagger. If he had even loved Sarah less, he would still have resented the consistent injustice of the minister's behavior towards her. That he did happen to love, as well as to be bound to protect her, did not tend to make him more lenient. And, tact not being one of his strong points, he could think of nothing better to

do than to go off and "have it out with the guv'nor," as he expressed it, then and there.

He found the old man in the garden at the back of the house. He was a bit of a flower-fancier in his way, and now he was stooping over a pet fuchsia.

"Back already, Sam?" he said. "Look here; I believe it's coming out double this year. That must have been the—"

He was speaking quite pleasantly again now; gardening had a wonderfully good effect on his temper. But Sam was not to be so easily appeased.

"I say, dad," he interrupted, rather abruptly, "what have you been saying to Sarah?"

"She's been complaining," thought the minister, at once. "I felt it my duty to say a few words to her," he said, very stiffly. "If a young woman can't take a few words of Christian exhortation in a proper spirit, I'm very sorry, of course; but it doesn't make any difference as to what *I* ought to do."

"Christian exhortation!" repeated Sam. "I'd just like to have heard it, that's all!" He paused a moment, then went on with unwonted decision. "Well, look here, dad, when I think my wife's in want of exhortation, I'll give it her myself; and till *I* think so, I'll just trouble you to leave it alone."

"If my conscience, Samuel, requires—"

"Well, then, you must just spifigate your conscience! But you know your conscience has no more to do with it than that!" he said, snapping his fingers impatiently. "If it tells you anything at all, I'll bet you anything you please it's just the other way. It's a shame, dad, a burning shame!" he went on, more hotly, beginning to pace up and down the garden walk. "I wouldn't have believed it of you! Here's as good a wife as ever a man had, and as good a daughter, too, and yet you're everlastingly slanging her or jawing at her round the corner, which is as bad. If she wasn't next thing to a spint, she wouldn't put up with a day of it—and"—he faced round suddenly, and stood still—"and I'll be hanged if I put up with it any longer for her! So now you know!"

He turned on his heel and marched off, without giving a chance for anything more, were it recrimination or submission.

Which would it have been? The minister stood looking after him with an expression of blank dismay which had its inwardly tragic as well as its outwardly comic side. Then he frowned, and tried to nurse up his resentment for a bit. He turned back to his

gardening, and bent over his flowers as before. But, all at once, one precious bud fell, nipped off short by a tremulous movement of a hand which was not so steady as before. And if Sam could have seen his face, he might have relented even from his just anger.

CHAPTER X

THE Christmas holidays came, and Runciman took his wife down to Somerset Strand. Beulah, shut in on all sides, was hot and relaxing, and Mattie (though she certainly did not make the least of her ailments) was really not well, and needed the change.

At the Strand she had a few weeks of real enjoyment. The place was crowded with visitors, chiefly from Kimberley; there was no haughty exclusiveness about them: they were sociable, very demonstrative, and Mattie got as much gayety and admiration as her heart could wish. It was a return to the world, the more delightful that it was unexpected and un hoped for; since to the world she had bidden, in spirit, a sorrowful and as she believed an eternal farewell when she drove away from the docks at Cape Town. Mattie was not too particular as to the quality of the admiration she met with; she had a very catholic spirit on this point, and, though not incapable of appreciating the refined, she was tolerant also of the merely well-intentioned.

And she really did make a sensation. Deny it as they may, there is probably no colonial heart in which there does not lurk a sort of envious respect for the Englishman born. And, besides the claim to something like deference, however well disguised as patronage, which she owed to her nationality, Mattie's own personality gave her another. Far less of a lady in heart and mind than the homely-mannered Sarah, this girl was yet susceptible of an external polish which the other never acquired. She was not a lady, but she was a much better imitation of one than is often found, and among the visitors at the Strand she might well have passed for the real thing. She had an innate taste in the matter of dress, which alone would have marked her out in that company. Her voice was refined, and her laugh—a rare gift—musical. She was dainty all over, with a sort of infantine daintiness, not too ethereal to be delicious, but enough so to be enchanting. From the worst forms of mental vul-

garity she had been saved by her training; Miss Grover's establishment could no more have been vulgar in tone than it would ever be polished in manners. But on this point nature and circumstances had come to Mattie's aid: she was instinctively imitative of the forms of good breeding; and she had been in love with a gentleman. It may be that she had seldom thought of him again—and, to do her justice, she had never consciously dwelt on the thought—but Gerald Blake had been no unimportant factor in Mattie's education.

So it came to pass that among the crowd of gorgeous Jewesses, amiable Dutch *vrouws*, and colonial girls of the period, Mattie shone like a star. She got, indeed, so much attention that it seemed rather wonderful that she did not find Runciman jealous. But she received it all with so much levity, the whole was so obviously the merest surface froth of social amusement, that unless he had parted with the last vestige of common-sense, even Jesse could scarcely have disturbed himself seriously about a state of things so patently superficial. In fact, Mattie would have endured nothing else. After the constant oppression of a nature which, equally in its bad points and in its good ones, was infinitely too passionate for her, she found a positive refreshment, an invigoration, merely in superficiality.

However, he did not enjoy himself, and he was glad when it was time to go back. He had behaved quite well and quietly during the whole visit; nothing had been said or done that could startle or offend her. Nevertheless, there were indications which, if she could have read them aright, might have proved valuable for future guidance. There was the strange triumph which came into his face as soon as they left the railway station and got into the cart which was to take them back to Beulah; there was a certain levity of spirits with which he surprised her during the drive—a levity so unusual, so unnatural in him as to point to the relaxation of some extreme nervous tension; there was the sort of passion of ownership with which he looked at her and touched her all that evening. But there was nothing in Mattie, either intellectual or emotional, which could have helped her to read signs so slight. If she thought about his mood at all, it was to suppose that Jesse had been bored and was glad to have got away; all the ladies at the Strand had agreed that gentlemen never did know what to do with themselves on a holiday.

For her own part, hers had made a different creature of her. She came back looking wonderfully better in health and spirits; it was

marvellous to see how she had shaken off her nervousness and oppression so soon as she was released from the moral and physical forcing-house in which she had been so long pent up. On the other hand, she was sillier and more flippant. It was much the same mood as she had got into on the voyage, but with the sentiment left out, and pure gratified vanity substituted for it. That sentiment might have been silly enough, but it had been also a genuine, and, largely, an unselfish one; and the change now was not for the better.

But Jesse, to whom she had suddenly become rather more responsive in a giggling, pert kind of way, had no fault to find with a state of spirits which put such a sparkle into her eye, such a peach-bloom upon her cheek—a condition in which every physical charm was enhanced by a coquetry which, by means of a sham resistance, fired his blood with all the excitement of a real victory.

And if he, for his own reasons, saw nothing amiss, Sarah, for her part, was too glad to see her little girl bright and merry again, to have much heart for remonstrance, even at Mattie's worse outbreaks of saucy silliness. Sarah had no great gift for subtle distinctions; to her the girl's mood seemed to differ little from what she had known well in her at home. And of all sense of special responsibility for Mattie's moral well-being she was now relieved. Would not Jesse Runciman's wife be in good keeping?

January passed. School had been reopened for some three weeks; to outward appearance everything was going on as usual. There seemed no reason why, in that retired spot, any change, other than what was brought about by the slow, disintegrating forces of mere time, should ever come.

Then one morning towards the middle of February the minister came into the kitchen where Sarah was engaged, with an open letter in his hand, and told her briefly that she must get the spare bedroom ready, for a visitor was coming that day—a gentleman. He vouchsafed no details, though the advent of a visitor to Beulah was an almost unprecedented event. He never did give Sarah any information. If she happened not to be in the way when he told any given piece of news to Sam she might never have heard it at all, so far as Mr. Glasse was concerned. And that day it happened that Sam had started soon after daybreak for the Paarl, on business connected with the shops, and was not expected home till evening.

So now the minister gave his orders and went off. Sarah scarcely noticed this as a discourtesy. The discipline at Marston had enforced

such unquestioning obedience to unexplained and often seemingly purposeless commands that thus to obey had become a second nature. She had not even yet begun to feel that she had any right to explanations. She got the room ready and thought no more about it.

The minister came back in the middle of the day, and they had a *tête-à-tête* dinner; the meal was not of the liveliest description, and conversation did not flourish. Sarah ventured to ask whether the guest would come back with Sam; but he said he did not know—did it make any difference? and as she could not honestly say it did, this subject fell dead like the others.

Domestic affairs kept her at home all the afternoon; towards sunset—earlier in that narrow valley than elsewhere—she was able to get free for a while. It was near the time when Sam might be expected back; she went down to the garden gate and stood looking along the road. She was conscious, if not of a certain disappointment, at least of no extra elevation of spirits when the empty stretch of shady road was invaded, not by the cart, but by the buxom figure of Mrs. Davis.

Mrs. Davis halted at the gate, but when Sarah asked her to step inside—an offer prompted by unmitigated duty—she declined.

“Not now, my dear,” she said, in a tone which permitted a hope in the hearer that this misfortune might be repaired by and by. “I’ve been all round the place this afternoon, and I must be gettin’ home. Besides, you’ll be havin’ company along directly, won’t you? lookin’ out for it now, ain’t you? And I’m that hot and dusty and all to pieces, I’d be ashamed, for Davis’s sake, that the new school-master should see me for the first time so. It ain’t fit; not in Davis’s position.”

Sarah was too much stunned to betray herself. She just caught hold of one of the wooden spikes at the top of the gate; for a moment Mrs. Davis’s voice grew indistinct to her ears; it murmured on and on, but all it said to her was, “the new school-master,” and this it repeated many times over before there came a pause indicating a question.

“I beg your pardon, ma’am; I didn’t hear,” she said, mechanically.

“You feel the heat above a bit, don’t you?” said Mrs. Davis, sympathetically. “I mind ’twas just the same with me first year I came out; I used to get such fainty turns Davis was fairly scared. But you’ll soon get used to it. I was only sayin’ you’ll miss your little

friend, won't you? To be sure, it's a fine rise for her; not but what all them that know about things have been lookin' for it this year or more."

"Have they?" said Sarah.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Davis, rather huffily; "I should think you might know, if any one did! I suppose to-day ain't the first time such a thing was ever talked about in *this* house. I'm sure no one hates gossip worse than me; but there's no call to be so close as all that between friends. If 'twas *you* as were goin' to be a minister's wife, you couldn't be more particular. I'm thinkin' you're better cut out for it than your friend is."

As much pride as her gentle nature could contain helped Sarah's loyalty in suppressing the questioning cry that rose to her lips; and both together only just sufficed to do it.

"Not as I've a word to say against Mattie Runciman," said Mrs. Davis, suddenly reflecting that, under the circumstances, this was a little too much like crying down her own wares. "Maybe she's not quite so stirrin' a body as might be looked for in a minister's wife; though she's brisked up wonderful of late, too. Like enough, 'tis this place takes it out of her. A hole it is, as I tell Davis, and a hole it always will be; and many's the time as washed-out rags has been *my* feelin's, and will be again; though I don't hold with givin' in. But, there! she is but young yet, to be sure; and if 'twas the time at the Strand as set her up so, why, everybody says as the air there ain't to be named in the same day with Kimberley—which Beaconsfield's all the same—so it 'll be a good thing all round. But I'm thinkin' you'll miss her, won't you?" With which Mrs. Davis wandered onwards.

Sarah almost ran up the path towards the house. If, after all, there might still be time to get over to the school! For, oh! what must Mattie be thinking of her? But the clock was on the stroke of six. Impossible to venture, with Sam, or the guest, or both, to be expected every minute. She turned and went, slowly enough now, into her own room, and there fought out the hardest battle for forgiveness which she had yet known in all her quiet life. For she knew that there had been no accidental omission, that news which all day long had been the property of the whole village had been wilfully kept from her, to whom, of all others, it was matter of most concern. Ah, of how much concern! Not at this time, with the necessity of outward composure at least laid upon her, did she dare to begin to think how terribly alone she was going to be left.

After all, Sam and the guest arrived together, Sam having happened to be passing the station just as the stranger was engaging a cart for Beulah. Mr. Reeves was a commonplace sort of man, of about five-and-thirty, with a tendency to book-language when he was nervous, as he was now, and, in general, with a cheerily-obsequious manner more suggestive of a shop-walker or a commercial traveller than of a school-master. Yet a school-master, and a successful one, he had been for many years.

He was very polite to Sarah, apologizing profusely for "making so sudden a demand on her hospitality. But, you know, madam, the first duty of a school-master, as of a soldier, is obedience. He will never command who has not learned to obey."

"See Standard V. copy-book," muttered Sam. On him, no less than on Sarah, the mine had been sprung unexpectedly, and he had not taken kindly to the innocent cause of his surprise during their eighteen miles' drive. Though, indeed, poor Mr. Reeves may be dismissed at once as nothing worse than a well-intentioned bore. Indeed, when sure of his position, he was scarcely even a bore; but this evening, naturally enough, he was not feeling very sure of anything. These jack-in-the-box sort of effects were favorites with the Central Committee. They were held to promote discipline.

"I fear Mrs. Runciman (I understand there is such a lady?) will have been put to even greater inconvenience. Mrs. Reeves, I may say, had her composure much disturbed yesterday by the intelligence. Not so much on account of any—as I might say—dislike to the change," he explained, hastily, "but owing to the suddenness of the notice."

"Why, they're both to be allowed three weeks, ain't they?" asked Sam, not so amiably as usual. He was really sorry for Sarah, though he had no suspicion how much she deserved his pity, and he hated what he called "foolery," under which head he classed together the language of Mr. Reeves and the disciplinary measures of the Central Committee. And these two feelings rather ruffled his temper.

"Three weeks, I believe, is the time," said Mr. Reeves, with an inward sigh at the prospect for himself—an unwilling trespasser on an unenthusiastic hospitality. "Three weeks from next Monday. I am given to understand that Mr. Runciman is to be presented in Cape Town as a candidate for the ministry on this next ensuing Sabbath; and the period of examination and preparation will extend from that day till the third Sabbath after. He will then, as I un-

derstand, receive his recognition, and proceed at once to the scene of his new duties."

"And is Mrs. Runciman to wait here?" asked Sarah. She felt as though she really must ask something.

"That, I believe, is the arrangement. She will require the time—at least, I gathered from expressions of Mrs. Reeves's that *her* arrangements would certainly take no less. And it is also considered well by the Committee that the candidate should pass this period free from all carnal—I would say from all distract—that is—I mean—"

But here he got so hopelessly and miserably confused that Sam took pity on him, and changed the subject.

As for the minister, he was extremely quiet. He did not feel at all aggressively pleased with himself for his behavior that day; so little pleased that he was prepared to receive even forgiveness meekly—a point to which he did not often come when it was Sarah who held the right of pardon. Perhaps the message he had had to bear that morning had touched his conscience through his memory. He, too, though his spiritual temperament, at its best, had little enough in common with that of Jesse Runciman, had once known emotions, hopes, resolves, to which the event had hardly answered. It may be that he could have wished it otherwise. These of us are fortunate who can look back, even from middle-age, upon the aspirations of our youth without a pang of something akin to remorse.

He scarcely spoke at all till they rose from table; then, turning to the new-comer, he said,

"I suppose you won't care about going down to the school this evening, Mr. Reeves? I think I may say you'll find everything in very good order; a quarter of an hour to-morrow morning will quite set you straight with it all. And, you see, this is a serious thing for a young man; and Runciman seemed a good deal—a good deal taken aback, when I told him, and I fancy he'd as soon not be disturbed to-night, if you didn't mind."

Was it a not ungenerous envy that he felt? was it compassion? Whatever it was, it lent to his voice a note more sympathetic than, perhaps, any one present had ever heard in it before.

Mr. Reeves eagerly disclaimed any desire to anticipate the morrow; and every one stood for a few minutes in an awkward doubt as to where to go, or what to do next, till Sam proposed that they should have a pipe on the stoep. Mr. Reeves assented with alacrity, the minister with relief, and the three went out together.

The minister did not stay long; he was not quite in tune with his ordinary world that evening. Sarah heard him come in and go to his room. The other two remained, and, by degrees, under the soothing influence of tobacco, seemed to be getting on better together. Reeves became less stilted, and Arkwright more friendly; they dropped into natural talk—the little gossip of Cape Town and the suburbs; harmless, trivial, unelevating chat. Now and then they laughed a little.

The laughter, disjointed fragments of the talk, were caught by Sarah as she sat by the open window, at the other end of the stoep, and, for a moment, her soul rebelled. This, then, was what she was to be left to; this all her compensation for the loss of the one being in all her world with whom she had spiritual affinity!

She checked the murmur, even as it arose. But her sewing dropped upon her lap; she looked out into the darkness—the darker for the lamp within. The night was sown thick with stars; just above the black towering mass of the great eucalyptus near the gate hung the four silver points of the Southern Cross; the luminous trail of Magellan's Cloud lay swept athwart the further sky towards the mountains. Her eyes did not seek the stars; they looked to the gate, to the shadowy line of road, and then on, in spirit, right through the village to a white, thatched house, among oak-trees.

What was he doing, what feeling, that night? "Runciman seemed a good deal taken aback"; that was all she had heard—so little, so poorly put, yet it seemed to her to imply everything that she would have expected. In this moment even Mattie became a secondary consideration.

There would be hours and days to come when the mere human heart of the woman would ache and hunger for her little girl; but the time was not now. Her wonderings, her speculations, turned into purest longings for blessings on this soul, come to a great crisis; her longings made themselves wings and mounted up as prayers.

And, indeed, he needed such; how greatly, how urgently, no one would ever know so well as—in these first hours, at least—he knew it, and acknowledged it himself.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER all, it was not till the next afternoon that Sarah got down to the school. 'Sina was as much demoralized by the one modest guest as though he had been a regiment of dragoons. She would do little but giggle and chatter, and such work as she did put her hand to was done in a style to entail more trouble on her mistress than if she had left it alone. But when, at last, there was no work remaining which the girl could either leave undone or do wrong, Sarah set off with a sense of deliverance.

Through the open window of the school-room the sing-song murmur of children's voices came wafted as always; but the tones which, now and again, stilled or directed theirs were different.

The house-door stood open; Sarah knocked and went in, as she was used to do, without waiting for an answer. Yet, when she had gone into the parlor and found it empty, there was a sense of change which left her hesitating strangely as to what to do. She went out again into the passage, and at the same moment Mattie opened the kitchen door and saw her.

"Oh, Sarah, is that you?" she said. "Go into the parlor and sit down, there's a dear. I'll be with you in half a minute."

Sarah went back, and somehow she felt a little suppressed. She had learned, on the voyage, that Mattie could patronize, on occasion; she had never quite learned to stand up against her patronage. She never dreamed of resenting it; but there was no mood—not even the giddiest—in which she found the better part of Mattie so hard to get at.

When the latter did come in, after a rather long half-minute, it was with something of the uncertain dignity—half tentative, half exultant—of a very little child conscious of a new frock.

"I was beginning to make the inventory," she said; "but there's plenty of time, really, isn't there? Sit down, won't you? and have a good talk; I have lots to tell you. I thought you'd have been in yesterday," she added, a little reproachfully.

"It wasn't my fault," said Sarah—perhaps for the first time in her life.

"I'm sure it wasn't," said Mattie, with a little compunction expressing itself in a caress. "And I ought to have come up to see you—you good old thing—but people were in and out just from morning till night. I declare I hadn't time to turn round!"

The conscious exultation in her voice was, like her manner, really too childlike to be offensive.

"Weren't you surprised when you heard?" she went on, with a certain gleefulness. "*I* was; well, I am still! It seems so funny!" and here she passed into the giggling stage. "Anna Marais was here this morning; she's so ridiculous! she would keep on asking after his reverence, and wanting to write the labels: Rev. J. Runciman! She did write it all over a half-sheet of his exercise paper, but I threw it in the fire. So silly! and he isn't that yet, either, is he?"

Sarah had never been able to help a secret wonder at Mattie's persistence in this sort of school-girl friendship with Anna Marais. With all her charity she could not feel it to be an improving one, and it did seem a little strange to her that Runciman should not see this himself, and check it. But, even if a natural dislike to interference had not restrained her, it was obvious that to argue with Mattie, in her present mood, would have been lost labor. Sarah knew this of old, and did not try.

"Is Mr. Runciman gone, then?" she asked, with some surprise.

"Oh, no; he isn't to go till to-morrow, the Committee gentlemen said, so as to put the new man into the way of things, if he wants it. But Mr. Reeves seems to be getting on pretty well; it's rather lucky, so far as any good he's likely to get out of Jesse goes. Well! I believe they did spend half an hour over the registers and things together this morning, when Mr. Glasse brought him down; but I had run over to Mrs. Davis's, so I can't be sure even of that. But Johanna said so."

"Mr. Runciman must feel a great deal about this."

"I suppose he does. At least, when Mr. Glasse told him yesterday, he turned as white as a sheet, and he seemed so upset that Mr. Glasse said the assistant might finish keeping school; Jesse needn't go back. It was very kind of him, I'm sure; what a dear old gentleman he is, Sarah, isn't he? I do like him!"

"I'm glad, dearie," said poor Sarah, gently. "He does bear his people on his heart before the Lord, I'm sure; all of them."

"So, then, Jesse thanked him, and went right off and shut himself into that half-furnished room at the back, you know—that room

we've never wanted ; and that's the last I've seen of him. He won't let anybody in. But Johanna was awfully frightened last night, because she heard him speaking ; she's such a goose ! she would have it there were spooks in there, and he was talking to them."

"Mattie, darling," entreated Sarah, "what has come to you this afternoon?"

Mattie looked up, with a half-formed intention of being saucy ; then, with the action of a child told that it is making mother sorry, she blushed, hung her head, nestled up to Sarah's side in a silent plea for forgiveness, and so sat quiet for about fifteen seconds.

"Well," she said, "then you'll like to see him again, before he goes, won't you ? I'll go and tell him you're here ; I dare say he'll come out for you."

She rose, and moved towards the door ; Sarah sprang up in real distress.

"No, no ; what are you going to do ? Pray, pray, Mattie, don't disturb him !"

But Mattie walked on unheeding. Sarah followed, still begging her to stop. They had both reached the door of the room where he was, and Mattie's hand was raised to knock, when she paused. What she heard stopped her. From within came the sound of speech, as she had said ; but voice and words came broken and interrupted. He was weeping aloud.

Sarah drew back a step ; she looked, as it were, shocked. With an instinct truer than her traditions she felt ashamed at having intruded, even thus unwittingly, upon the privacy of a soul. Mattie stood a moment ; then she jerked her chin a little and turned away ; her expression was a curious mixture of pity and impatience.

"Oh, well," she said, "never mind ; it's no use, you see, just now, is it ? He doesn't start till about eleven to-morrow morning ; perhaps he'll be going up to the minister's before that, and you may see him then. Come back and let's finish our talk. I haven't half said what I wanted. It will be nice to be in a real big place, won't it ? with lots going on. I wish it was Kimberley, not Beaconsfield—it would look better on letters and that ; though, of course, with the 'bus, it's really all the same thing. And I *do* wish he was to have a decent sort of congregation ! I think it's downright waste, after the education they've given him, to go and set him nothing but a lot of low native locations to look after ; but I suppose it's because he can talk Kaffir. He'd have made a lovely preacher, don't you think so ? I'm sure people would have gone after him

a lot. Anna Marais said that their Lena told her after last prayer-meeting—”

But this valuable opinion was never transmitted—not to Sarah, at any rate; for just as they reached the parlor, another of Mattie's now numerous visitors was seen coming up the garden, and Sarah was glad enough of the excuse for making her escape.

Mattie spent the rest of the day in a whirl of work, half of which was quite unnecessary, and in chatter, of which to say that it was unnecessary would be to speak too leniently. Even Sarah was scarcely sooner out of sight than she was out of mind; as for Jesse, if Mattie thought of him at all it would be hard to say exactly how her thoughts ran. She was not indifferent, to his comfort; she looked over his clothes and did everything that the most affectionate wife could have done to provide for all his requirements while he should be away. Of this Mattie was very capable; her silliness was chiefly moral; practically, when she was not lazy she was a very good housewife indeed—clever rather than otherwise, both with head and hands, in all domestic work.

But for anything higher, her feeling might have been fairly summed up in the words, “Oh! *I* have nothing to do with *that*.” Only a few weeks ago she would have affirmed the same, but she would have felt it resentfully. It was no good symptom that now she took it lightly. She had begun to acquiesce in the position in his life to which he himself had first assigned her. Yet, however much in the wrong she might be now, however much in the wrong she might put herself hereafter, it could never be denied that she had, to the best of her ability, made a very fair start. Of course, she was not a woman who could ever have raised a man's standard, or have shamed him by her very personality out of making her the object of a merely sensual passion.

But she would have been quite willing, at first, to have allowed Jesse to drag her up to his own standard, or as near it as her capacities might enable her to go. And, unless it had been quite of late, when excited vanity had for a while mastered, rather than made her forget, that secret underlying constitutional repugnance—she had certainly never been guilty of amusing herself with deliberately playing upon his weakness. The first failure had undoubtedly been his—and yet, fail as he might, the situation, in which he could scarcely do otherwise, had not been of his own seeking.

She was resolved that Jesse should at least allow her an inter-

view long enough to give all necessary directions and explanations before he went. As a house-mistress she could be despotic, and was not disposed to tolerate shirking, on any plea. But she was not called upon to exercise her authority on this occasion. Rather to her surprise, he appeared next morning at the usual hour for family prayers, conducted them in a restrained sort of way, without any special allusion, or variation from the ordinary form, and then sat down to breakfast with her with scarcely a word. He looked very much more subdued than he had done for a long time—was pale and grave, and when he spoke his voice was so low and quiet that Mattie scarcely knew it. He ate very little, but he made no display of any kind; all Mattie's questions he answered clearly and sensibly, making notes for her of the chief things for which she would have to arrange. She was perfectly delighted. That he was getting momentarily more and more beyond the point of quietness—where, if he could have stopped, it would have been desirable indeed—into a state of the most miserable depression, she was not able to see.

After breakfast, she sent him off to do his packing, and it was not till shortly before the time he had to start that she saw him again. She was busy in the kitchen when she heard him moving about the house, apparently seeking something, and she called out to him.

"What is it?" she said, when he came in. "Were you looking for Johanna? I've had to send her up to Welgelegen to see if they can lend me a bottle of that stuff they use for the fowl-sickness; one of our hens is just dead, and I believe it is going through the lot. Such a nuisance! they've always kept so well, and I thought Mrs. Reeves would take them off my hands, and be glad. But I'll get you anything you want."

"I don't want anything. It was you I wanted to speak to before I go."

"Well, will it do if you stay here? Because, you see, I'm getting your dinner ready for you to take with you, and the cart will be round pretty soon."

She was standing by the table, cutting away diligently at a great home-baked loaf as she spoke. She looked exquisitely pretty. She was excited, joyously excited, and excitement always became her; she was so made for a quick-pulsing vitality, that, in order perfectly to fulfil the ideal on which nature had formed her, her blood must needs be dancing. The glow of the fire, from which

she had just come away, had flushed her cheek with a crimson none too vivid for her style of beauty. Her sleeves she had rolled back for her work, and her round, firm white arms seemed to be only displayed to more advantage with every movement. Mattie's hands, though small and pretty and well-kept, did yet show traces of downright manual labor, but her arms were lovely.

Jesse remained standing near the door; his eyes, cast on the ground, followed mechanically the windings of some stain in the floor of beaten earth, and of all he might have had to say no word came.

"Well?" said Mattie, a little impatiently.

"Haven't you got anything to say to *me*?" he said.

He raised his eyes suddenly, and the look in them, which was always most pathetic in the rare moments of his humility, seemed to implore help for the weak, insurgent soul against its temporarily slumbering oppressor. It was to ask succor from an ally whom he himself had largely helped to render powerless.

"No, I don't think there's anything more," said Mattie, reflectively, pausing a moment in her operations; "everything was pretty well arranged at breakfast, wasn't it? We really got through much quicker than I thought for."

"I didn't mean—" he said, and broke off—"that is, I meant—Mattie, don't forget to pray for me while I'm away."

He said it with an awkwardness of which he felt ashamed, with some reason. The undisguised amazement with which she opened her eyes upon him—eyes from which the bewitching earthly sparkle had scarcely had time to die into a proper demureness—completed his humiliation.

"Oh," she said, "very well; but I expect I don't know much about it."

With his principles, the only answer he could have made to such a speech from the being for whose spiritual condition he acknowledged the highest responsibility would have been, "If that is so, I have done you a great wrong, and I ask you to forgive me." But though he was certainly feeling tolerably humbled, he could not quite bring himself to this, so he ignored the remark altogether.

Mattie would have respected him more for a reproof, with however little grace it might have come from him.

"I am frightened about this," he said. The despondency in his tone was little short of despair. "Everything ought to be so dif-

ferent; I know that. We shall be set as lights to the world—and our life, that ought to be a dwelling in the courts of the Temple—not to go out day or night. Well, I know our house is not so with God. Do you suppose I haven't found out that in these two days? I know things aren't as I meant them to be when we started; but I want them to be different. And you—you can do anything with me—don't you understand how much you could help me?"

"I don't see that!" exclaimed Mattie, with some not unnatural indignation. "If we aren't so awfully religious all round as we might be, I don't see that *I'm* the one to come upon to put things right. A man ought not to want to be dragged around by his wife; I know enough of the Bible to know *that's* not Scripture, anyway! If there's to be any helping at all, it's you that ought to do it to me, not I to you."

He winced; it was the plainest speaking he had heard for years, external to his own conscience, but he was too much depressed just now to resent it.

"It would be easier for you than it would for me," he said, sadly rather than reproachfully, "because you don't feel about me—care for me—like I do about you. I could see that all those weeks we were at—"

He stopped short; he had honestly meant never to say this, never even to allow it to haunt his thoughts. But every subject about which he could rightfully or wrongfully torment himself being just then uppermost, this had slipped out with the rest.

Mattie had just finished her preparations. She threw down the knife with a clatter, and pushed back the plates and dishes with angry vigor.

"Oh, Jesse, do try and not be so silly!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "It's just like the girls at Marston used to be one summer over their 'particular friends,' till Miss Grover said nobody was to be allowed to walk or stand about in twos for the next three months."

He looked dreadfully ashamed; more, perhaps, at his own failure than at her words.

"I beg your pardon," he said, humbly enough; "I ought not to have said it; and just now, of all times, when—I don't know how it is!"

"You ought not to get into such silly ways as could let such things into your head at all," said Mattie, not unwilling to improve

the occasion. "I don't believe there's anybody in the place goes on like you do, and I suppose other folks are fond of each other, too. We should do well enough if you'd only be sensible."

For the life of her, in her present mood—though she really meant what she said, though her very words brought her a sort of shuddering memory—she could not resist the instinct of coquetry. She tossed her head, and turned half aside, and looked back at him across her shoulder with a pout which scarcely hid a dimple, and a gleam in her saucy eyes that was very little like resentment.

His own eyes seemed to blaze up all in a moment from the dimness of physical exhaustion, as a smouldering fire flares up at the touch of some spirituous liquor.

"I can't look at you and be sensible!" he cried, with a rather pathetic passion. He made one great stride towards her, and fell on his knees beside her, clasping her round the waist, and kissed her beautiful bare arms all over, and held her tighter and tighter, dragging her down towards him; dumb all the while, though every breath was eloquent not so much of words as of an inarticulate cry.

Mattie struggled, with something very like terror.

"Let me go!" she cried between tears and laughter.

At her first movement he had done so; the whole had been an affair of some ten seconds. He stood up, trembling all over.

"There, you see," exclaimed Mattie. Already she spoke little more than pettishly, pulling into order, with conscious, petulant touches, her dress which he had disarranged. "There, you see; that's just what I was saying!"

He threw himself upon the window-seat, and buried his face in his hands, and neither looked up nor spoke for many moments. The painted timepiece against the wall gave its five minutes' preparatory whir.

"Are you quite ready?" asked Mattie, "because it's just upon time to start." He lifted his head then.

"What shall I do?" he said, desperately. "I know harm will come of this! I'm not fit—it isn't safe—it will be no position for me! It is men under authority that should have others under them—I have none over myself, none at all. The lowest post—a slave's place, with the lash ready for every least slip—would be the place for me; it would be kindness to me—not this! Will they make me a keeper of the vineyard? me! Mine own vineyard have I not kept—and I can't!"

"Well!" said Mattie, sharply, "if you really think that, you'd

better not go. After all, nobody can force you to against your will."

She certainly had no desire to persuade him; her words were the outcome of sheer impatience. But to him at this moment they were no other than the voice of conscience, and they brought him to a turning-point in his life. On the first instant his face seemed to clear up; it was the look of one who has found a solution. For his language, though tainted with his habitual exaggeration, did really represent, not his present excited feelings merely, but his convictions. He did unfeignedly dread a position for which everything that he found out about himself warned him he was unfit; everything—for once his eyes had been opened to one point he could see plenty. Yet he was so little practical that, till it was put into words for him, this simple way out of his difficulty had really never occurred to him. It was, in fact, a great deal too obviously common-sense. But now he did, as in a flash, see absolutely and for certain what he ought to do. And for one moment he saw it with relief.

Yet—not to go! That is—to wait on, braving every wagging tongue in Beulah, till, in a day or two, a summons should arrive which, short of severing his connection with his community altogether, he could not refuse—a summons to an explanation. To go, then, in cold blood, to Cape Town, not as a hero, but as a culprit. To stand before his judges—tolerant they would be at first and half-amused, as at an over-strained scrupulosity, which yet did him honor. And then to confess; ay, and to confess not in general, sensational terms, but in such sober, unadorned detail as should best carry conviction, that he—the model, the saint, the very spiritual pride and pet of his sect, whose praise was in all the churches, was so weak, undisciplined, and inconsistent, as to be unfit for the least responsibility, less deserving of any sort of promotion than was such a man as, say, Samuel Arkwright, for whose spiritual attainments Jesse had always cherished a great secret contempt. This was what not going meant, and more. A scandal—and worse, a ridiculous one; a humiliation so public that he could never hope to hold up his head again.

His very soul within him turned sick with the thought of the shame; his pride tasted the bitterness of death beforehand, and fought and prayed against the decree of conscience.

The clock jangled out the first stroke of eleven; Mattie looked out of the window.

"Come," she said, "there's the cart, just going round."

He stood up, and sat down again.

"Are you really not going?" she exclaimed. She spoke just then in mere incredulous surprise, but he heard in her tone everything that everybody would say. He shivered—hesitated, then rose with a sort of despair, and walked to the door.

"Yes," he said, miserably, "I'm going."

Mattie took up the basket in which she had been packing the provisions, threw a cloth over her head, and they went down to the gate together.

He walked with his eyes fixed on the ground, and did not say another word. He got into the cart. It was a quiet enough departure; a few children loitering in the road—it was Saturday, so there was no school—grinned and nudged one another as the Baas drove off. There were no other witnesses. The minister had meant to come down, but, at the last moment, had been summoned elsewhere, and Beulah, to its credit be it said, was too busy a place to have any idlers about at that hour of the morning.

Mattie waved her hand; he made a gesture—it was farewell, entreaty, deprecation. She just caught the movement as the cart turned round; the movement, and nothing of its significance.

The cart drove off down the embowered road between the quince edges; a little cloud of yellow dust rose up around the wheels and round the horses' feet; soon a turn in the road hid all from sight.

Mattie stood looking, still, towards the point where it had disappeared, but her thoughts outstripped it far. Mid-day lay hot and still upon the land. The air was pierced and vibrant with the shrill, ceaseless whirr of the crickets; now and again the children in the road called to one another in a louder tone than usual; there was no other sound. Between the trees, the opaline of the mountains showed tremulous through a quivering glassy haze of heat—those bounding mountains which for Mattie had already dissolved their prisoning bars and made a way for her life to escape. She stood holding to the gate with both hands—a child's attitude; and the dimples came and went continually, one smile scarcely passed away before another was born; her little feet kept a sort of dancing movement on the gravel path.

"Only three weeks more of this!" she said to herself in her smiling.

CHAPTER XII

ON a certain day towards the end of April Gerald Blake was sitting at a desk, in an office in Stockdale Street, Kimberley, reading the letters that had come by the afternoon delivery. The brass plate on the door, and the lettering on the wire blinds, announced the office as that of the Linone River Land Company, and the envelopes which he had just torn open were addressed to the secretary of the same company. The room itself was furnished like any other room of the same description; on the walls, besides the inevitable picture-advertisement of the mail-steamer, were diagrams representing geological formations, sketch maps and plans, and one or two photographic views.

The letters which he opened—there were but two or three—did not seem to be of much importance. There was a report, which he glanced through hastily and filed; a prospectus, which he threw into the waste-paper basket. The third was addressed to G. Blake, Esq., and it was of a different description.

It was addressed in that indefinite handwriting which the principals of ladies' seminaries, some half-century ago, considered "elegant": a running, sloping, flowing kind of writing, done with a very hard pen, and absolutely innocent of character. The envelope was of that yellow paper, with visible lines, a mild glaze, and a fancy edge, found in England, in sea-side repositories, and somehow associated with shell-pincushions; a nameless, but not faint, perfume exhaled from it, which also carried back the mind to the same spots.

"Where does the Koh-i-noor get her scent from?" muttered Gerald. He took up the letter fastidiously, with something between amusement and disgust; when he opened it there fell out a note, written on paper to match, and a printed circular. He proceeded to read the note.

"MY DEAR MR. BLAKE,—I am sorry to have to inform you that I am leaving home unexpectedly to-morrow. I had hoped to have paid my annual visit to my dear uncle, by Wynberg, after the Bazaar in June; but an unfortunate attack of illness has caused him to summon me sooner to his side. I shall (D. V.)

be back in time for the Bazaar itself, but must miss, meanwhile, our pleasant gatherings of the Committee. I am very sorry. My place at the meetings will be kindly filled by Mrs. Runciman, and I am writing this to ask you kindly " (here the communication overflowed on to another sheet) "to make all arrangements for the management and decoration of my stall with her, all one as you would with me. She is a very nice lady and has great taste; I made her acquaintance last Christmas at Somerset Strand. She has only lately come to Kimberley, the Rev. Mr. Runciman having succeeded to the work so devotedly carried on among the poor heathen in the locations by the late excellent Mr. Phillips. Mrs. Van Eyssen desires her best compliments to you, and with the same from myself,

I am yours, very truly,

"SOPHY DE JONGH.

"P. S.—I detained this letter, expecting to have met you last night at Mrs. Nickerk's; but you were not there. I trust it was nothing unpleasant that detained you.

"P. S. S.—I send you the photograph you asked for; my friends think it good."

Blake threw down the third sheet of manuscript, and idly cut the string that secured the packet containing the object of his desires.

The portrait of the greatest heiress in Kimberley represented a young woman whose age it would have been difficult to guess. She was, in point of fact, four-and-twenty; but she was so developed in form and so stolid in expression, that, judged merely by looks, she seemed at least five years older than her real age. Not exactly a bad-looking girl, only with nothing girlish about her; nothing, that is, but a certain wooden simplicity, such as might have been gathered from her letter; and even that was primitive rather than youthful. Everything about her was too heavy by far; the very gown she had been taken in was fit for a matron of many years' standing, and even such a one would have looked over-dressed in it. She wore a large locket and chain; her sleeves were somewhat too tight, and showed too much of substantial wrist, loaded with bracelets and bangles. She stood with one hand on the back of a chair, and looked out of the picture with her rather heavy eyes opened upon the beholder: dull, gentle eyes; a wide, meek brow—and then, a mouth and chin in which the patient obstinacy of generations seemed to be resumed. A woman as meek as Griselda, and as tenacious as a bull-dog.

Gerald Blake looked for a few brief moments at the pictured face; looked carelessly, indifferently, yet not altogether idly. Presently he took up the unlucky letter, with its terrible perfume, and threw down the written sheet beside the photograph; and for a second or so his eyes wandered from one to the other, and back again, with a

sort of purposeful, if lazy, criticism. Then he unlocked the desk and tossed the photograph into the drawer reserved for his own private affairs; the note he tore across and let it flutter into the basket at his feet. It was as though he were dismissing a problem, which, as yet, had but a very abstract interest for him. The printed circular he just glanced at before placing it among the various papers in the letter-rack; most of these were cards of invitations for tennis, or "at homes." It was the announcement of a bazaar to be held in the Town Hall on the eighteenth of June; Mrs. Runciman's name appeared among the assistants at the flower-stall.

"A very nice lady, with great taste," he quoted; "the Koh-i-noor is a good judge of that sort of thing!"

He looked at the memorandum tablet on the wall; there was a Committee meeting at four o'clock that afternoon. He rose, and prepared to go.

Gerald Blake to-day was not quite the same young man he had been on board ship. The plaintive languor which had marked his manner at that time had disappeared; his movements and bearing now were characterized by something which, in him, might pass for alacrity. It was scarcely held to amount to this in Kimberley; there Mr. Blake was admired, in such quarters as he was admired at all, for his genteel repose. His expression, too, was reasonably contented; on the whole, it was to be supposed that, for once, his affairs were fairly prosperous, for he was not a person who ever turned upon Fortune a more smiling face than she deserved. Indeed, there was nothing more noticeable in Gerald than the rapidity with which he became demoralized under stress of ill-success, or even of insufficient appreciation; it seemed that he was not robust enough, even in vanity, to be able to dispense with outside testimony. Reasonably contented now, it is true, he was; but no more. Love of actual bodily ease, and an abundance of feminine adulation sufficed, for the present, to keep him where he was. But at the bottom of his heart he hated Kimberley, and all that Kimberley contained; an Englishman of his particular stamp alone could know the utter revolt of his whole fastidious nature from the intense, bustling, crude colonialism of the place. Never, in the roughest and loneliest of his former experiences, had he felt himself more in exile.

He was on the very point of departing to keep his engagement, when he heard the door of the outer room open, and a voice there was no mistaking speaking to the office-boy. In another moment Westoby came in.

Gerald had not known that Westoby was, at that moment, within a hundred miles of Kimberley. Nominally, indeed, Kimberley had been his place of residence since long before his last return from Europe, but it was very rare to find him there for six weeks on end.

Whatever his business may have been, it seemed to entail incessant journeys; but it is likely that the need of working off some of his superabundant physical energy had as much to do with his constant expeditions as had any real necessity.

However, it is true that people who knew, but who, for sufficient reasons, did not make any public parade of their knowledge, said among themselves that the Baas had altogether too many irons in the fire, and that the smash, which must come soon, would be colossal. But this had been said any time for the last five years, yet nothing had come of the prophecy. Smashes, indeed, there had been, but they had not touched him. More than one earthen vessel, which had put to sea gayly enough in the wake or in the company of this iron pot, had come to irretrievable grief; but, to do him justice, none of them could have fairly taxed Westoby with being the active cause of their ruin. He had not, certainly, put out a finger to save them; he would not have thought of doing so, if even he had been much more indebted to his various associates than he really was. He was of opinion that if people embarked on affairs which they had neither brain nor nerve to carry through, they were not worth saving, from any point of view. But he as little went out of his way to hurry on their fate, as he would have moved an inch to avert it.

Westoby came in with a good-humored assurance of a favorable reception which a certain lack of enthusiasm in Blake's greeting did nothing to dispel. Gerald could scarcely have said why he would always rather have known Westoby to be anywhere sooner than in his own neighborhood. It was not his want of polish, his even aggressive scorn of it, his roughness and coarseness, that repelled the younger man. Strange to say, Gerald Blake, so critical, so supercilious, never seemed to take exception, in this man, to things which, in any one else, would have aroused his most intolerant disgust.

Neither, certainly, had he any practical cause of complaint against his late fellow-traveller; quite the contrary. On the face of it he owed, and felt that he owed, a good deal to him. It was through Westoby, mainly, that he had got his present berth; a comfortable one, in which the pay, hitherto, had been as regular as it was handsome—very handsome indeed, it might have been thought, for the

amount of work the secretary did for it. It was Westoby, too, who had invested his five hundred pounds for him. Gerald always retained an impression that he had been given elaborate explanations as to the nature of this investment; yet never, at any future time, was he able to recall clearly what they were. He troubled the less because, whatever it may have been, the result was so eminently satisfactory that, within two or three months, his capital had been nearly doubled.

After that first amazing haul Westoby happened to be away for several weeks, and, in his absence, Gerald had embarked, on his own account, upon speculations of which he was still awaiting the result. He had half wondered whether Westoby would resent the independence of the move; that such a thing should occur to him as possible gave a pretty clear indication of the kind of feeling it was which led him so greatly to prefer that gentleman's room to his company. But the Baas made no sign; he never made any inquiries, direct or indirect, about the matter. To be sure, it was quite unnecessary for him to do so, seeing he knew perfectly well; but of this Gerald could not be aware.

"Some time since you saw me in these diggings, ain't it?" said Westoby. "Or anywhere else, for the matter of that."

"You have been away, I think?" said Gerald. "Have you been back long?"

"Only since yesterday. You're just off somewhere, by the look of it; I won't keep you above a minute. I want to look over that last statement of accounts; ay, and that mining expert's report, while I'm about it."

Gerald went back to the desk, and unlocked it.

"Have you been up there lately?" he asked.

"There and elsewhere," said Westoby, widely.

"Is it all right?"

"Well, it didn't look any like running away last time I saw it. Land don't, as a rule, does it? Good, steady-going sort of investment, that. But you had better run up and take a look for yourself; it's a long time since you were there."

"It's a beastly journey," grumbled Gerald.

"No end of a fine property when you get there, though, ain't it?" said Westoby. He went up and looked at the views on the walls. These certainly represented a land "where every prospect pleases," and how can a photograph lie? Nevertheless, what Westoby was thinking as he gazed was, "And a blessed good thing that countries ain't labelled, like railway-stations!"

"Oh, it's a good enough property," said Gerald; "of course, I could see that."

He spoke with little interest; and, indeed, his words were pretty well drowned by the rattle of keys in various locks, and a more and more impatient rustling of papers. Westoby turned round from contemplating a view of an ox-wagon crossing a *drift* across the *soi-disant* Linone River.

"Hulloa!" he said, "what's up? I didn't mean to make such a piece of work as that."

"It's no piece of work," said Gerald, angrily. "I can lay hands on the things in a minute, of course."

"Don't hurry for me, you know," said Westoby. He threw himself into the great leather chair opposite the desk, stretched out his legs, and began whistling some music-hall ditty.

Gerald tossed back a lot of loose papers into a large iron-bound box near the door in a way not calculated to facilitate any future researches. He came back to the desk, which he had already reduced to a tolerable state of confusion, and, biting his lips with annoyance, he proceeded to look through it again, bitterly conscious of Westoby's eyes following his every movement. The small interior drawer in which he kept his own papers was half open; the photograph of Miss de Jongh had got stuck crossways in it, and kept it from shutting. Gerald shook the drawer so impatiently that the whole affair came out with a jerk, and all the contents were scattered about the desk. He gathered them together in a great hurry, put them back, and shut the drawer.

Westoby offered no assistance; he sat with his hands in his pockets, his eyes apparently turned, now, to contemplate the toes of his boots; sat, and whistled cheerily—a colossal monument of easy, good-humored repose. Yet he had not missed one item of any significance in his glimpse of those papers; not so much as the calculations scrawled here and there, in pencil, on the backs of envelopes, had escaped him.

"There!" exclaimed Gerald, the next moment, with as much satisfaction as though he had found them, blindfold, at the first attempt. "I knew I put the precious things here; there they are, both of them."

He threw over a bundle of papers to Westoby, who caught them, thanked him, and made no further remark on the subject. They walked together as far as the nearest cab-stand; there Gerald called a cab.

"You're not going my way, I suppose?" he said, with an unsuccessful attempt at regret.

"Not in that thing, anyway, you bet," said Westoby. He drew himself up, expanding his great chest in a very luxury of vigorous freedom, nodded to Blake as the latter sprang into the cab, and then walked leisurely on in the direction of Beaconsfield.

"Just what old Solomon told me," he thought. "Outrunning the constable, and not a speculation sound of the whole boiling! But you've no time to lose, my lad. That game," he nodded towards a point supposed to represent the office, "that game's nearly played out, and then where will you be? That's the time for the bills to come in; and that's all you're likely to see come in at all. You'll have to make up your mind, you know; you can't go fooling around forever. Let's see; here we are in May—call it May. Well, before Christmas, either old 'Jumper' de Jongh's heiress must be Mrs. Gerald Blake, or Mr. Gerald Blake will be stone-broke. That's how your chances stand, young woman. You're a fool to wish it; but if you do—bah! since half Kimberley knows you do—why, that's how they stand."

He paused to look in at a shop-window; then walked on at a quicker pace, and thought of that matter no more.

Meanwhile, Blake was driving on with a certain feeling of exultation. He did not care to examine the cause of this feeling too closely; not for worlds would he have admitted that it was largely due to a consciousness that he had got off very easily indeed, beyond anything that he expected. If there was one thing on earth that Gerald dreaded, with a secret, unacknowledged, but almost abject dread, it was Westoby's tongue; not so much his powers of invective—these, indeed, were exceptional. Even in Cape Dutch, a language possessing a copious and unique vocabulary of abuse, which can boast of many accomplished artists in this line among its adherents, Westoby yielded to none. To outdo some of them was, perhaps, impossible. But to Gerald this gift—though he could not be ignorant of it after having travelled with Westoby up country—was no terror at all compared with the Baas's powers of sarcasm. He did not suppose that Westoby would ever venture to be violent with him; but of his sarcasm he had once enjoyed a specimen for his own benefit, and he had never forgotten it.

It had been in the early days of his experiences in Kimberley, when, unsettled, unemployed, miserable, Gerald had been beginning to go down hill very fast. Degradation of this kind was not natural.

to him; he was too fastidious for it. If he could not ruin himself expensively and in style among his equals, he would not, as a rule, do it cheaply and nastily in the company to be found hanging about the bars of third-rate colonial hotels. He had to be very far gone on the road to despair before he took to that; he was very far gone then.

Then Westoby turned up in Kimberley. He had not made any stay there on his first arrival, and Gerald had been left to his fate for nearly a month. Westoby came back, and took in the situation at a glance; indeed, it was not a difficult one to discover. He very soon settled matters; Gerald's chief value to him, at present, lay in his outward respectability, and that he was fast losing. He came in, one evening, to Blake's room, and there read him such a lecture as Gerald had never had in his life. He did not directly reprove him; he judged the time had scarcely come for so overt an assertion of authority: Westoby never made such assertions merely for the pleasure of doing so. But he talked at him, till Gerald was absolutely cowed. Westoby could use the word "gentleman" with all the effect of a lash, and he did not spare it. He spared nothing, indeed; he did not husband his resources at all. When he left his victim, at last, he left him resolved, for the time being at any rate, to bear anything, to make any exertion, rather than expose himself to such a chastisement again.

Before the end of the week Westoby had found him something to do; his present work, in fact. Immediately afterwards, he insisted on Gerald's accompanying him up country at once, to inspect the Company's property—or what passed muster for it—and, very much against his will, Gerald had gone. Westoby never travelled luxuriously, and he certainly did not go out of his way to make this particular expedition any more comfortable than need be. By the time they got back Gerald was set up again; better, probably, than he had been for years, for it was the first time since he had left school that he had been under any approach to discipline.

He came back with the old associations broken; Westoby started him fair. Such of the directors as lived in Kimberley were very civil to him; he was constantly at their houses, and very soon introductions began to flow in. If the society to which he was introduced was not absolutely the most aristocratic in the place, it held, at least, a respectable second rank. In this matter it was not, of course, Westoby who appeared as prime mover; though how many of the strings he may have held secretly was a matter on which no one who knew him would have cared to dogmatize.

But to all appearance, once he had got Blake settled, he retired very much into the background, so far as Gerald was concerned; and that was how matters stood at the present time.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. GREATHEAD'S drawing-room, in which some eight or ten members of the Bazaar Committee were that afternoon assembled, did not give the idea of being a very habitable place. There was about it that air of being reserved for functions which tends to solemnize the spirits of the ordinary visitor.

There was a round and very shiny table in one corner, with a wool mat in the centre, and on this an epergne, mounted in electroplate, and filled with everlastings—dyed violet, magenta, and emerald-green—mingled with a few stalks of metallic-looking brown grasses. All round this were disposed photographic albums, and little blue and scarlet books of folding views: "Remembrances" of Grahamstown, of Port Elizabeth—even of Brighton, for Mrs. Greathead had been "home"; colonials born and bred seldom speak of the old country by any colder name.

The chairs and the sofa were all arranged round the walls, and it never seemed to occur to any of the occupants to try and group themselves, any more than they would do in church. There was a shiny cottage piano at the opposite corner to the shiny table; a few transcriptions of American melodies, a little dance music, and some rather untidy songs, together with a copy of Sankey's hymns, gave the measure of the musical tastes of the two Misses Greathead. On the walls, which were papered in white and gold, hung one or two oleographs in gilt frames, a few fancy brackets, and some Japanese fans and pincushions. There was a good deal of general impression of little bits of art muslin and ribbon all about the room; a sheep-skin kaross, thrown down in front of the sofa, and a Kaffir cushion—an elaborate patchwork of buck-skins, fawn and white and black—in one of the arm-chairs, looked out of keeping, without giving any distinct flavor to the general effect.

The members were sitting in twos or threes, leaving gaps along the circle. They were talking to one another, but there was not much animation about their manner; they seemed to be not so

much weary of waiting, as intent upon it to a degree which left their minds scarcely free for other things.

"Don't you think we might as well begin?"

There was a general movement of heads and eyes towards the speaker, as though she had proposed an enormity.

"Mr. Blake hasn't come yet," said Mrs. Greathead. There was a simple finality about the tone of this remark which touched upon grandeur.

The leader of the opposition took out her watch. She was an exceedingly quiet-looking, neat, rather a pretty little woman; a woman whom no one would have credited with the grown-up daughters she possessed. A colonial of English descent, from the Eastern Province, who had married into a Cape family, she had been about a year in Kimberley—a place she cordially detested. She had a way of uttering sarcasms in a gentle drawl, and with an unobtrusive, uninterested manner, which no one ever knew how to take.

"Well," she said, "I have my husband's nephew staying with me just now, and I had almost thought of trespassing on your kindness, to bring him this afternoon."

"I'm sure we should have been delighted, Mrs. Hofmeyer; shouldn't we, girls?" said the lady of the house; she always appealed to her daughters when she was at all nervous, and with Mrs. Hofmeyer no one ever felt very sure of their ground.

"You are most kind; there is nothing he would have enjoyed more," drawled that lady. "But I am afraid we should have quite spoiled his morals, among us; so it is better not."

"How do you mean?"

"Christian," she said, "is, at present, a singularly meek young man—a young man who knows his place, I may say. They do turn them out so, sometimes, from the College at Stellenbosch. I do believe he has never yet realized that he is a lord of creation. How sad if he should have first learned this demoralizing fact from anything he might have seen this afternoon!"

Every one laughed a little, from not knowing what else to do. But one girl laughed as if she understood; as if, even, she were grateful; would have liked to take the same line openly, herself. Her eyes met Mrs. Hofmeyer's; they were dark eyes and passionate, as little like the rather cold gray ones into which they looked as could be.

"Miss Solomon," said Mrs. Hofmeyer, answering them, "agrees with me, I know; but I'm afraid we are the only disciplinarians in the room."

"Don't let anybody call you names, Dora dear," called out a jolly-looking old lady, seated at the opposite end of the room. She was the chaperon of the flower-stall, and was not, herself, to all appearance, a person likely to be oppressively vigilant over her subordinates. "Don't let anybody call you names."

"I never do," said Dora, quietly; and to look at her any one would have easily believed it. "But I think that is rather a good one."

"Quite a mistake, my dear; quite a mistake!" retorted old Mrs. Johnson. "Look at Sophy de Jongh, now. I like Sophy, with all my heart; a dear, good, kind girl she is, but every one knows she's the sort that can't say 'Bo' to a goose. And yet— Well, I put it to everybody, were we ever kept waiting—by somebody as shall be nameless—when the meetings were at her house?"

This time the joke was within the reach of the company in general, and they honored it accordingly. But if a young lady in a nineteenth-century drawing-room ever looked little short of murder, Dora Solomon did so for one instant then. Mrs. Hofmeyer caught that look; a sort of cold sympathy came into her face. She came across to the girl and asked her some question about the business of the afternoon, keeping her in talk awhile.

"Did you see her look at me?" said Mrs. Johnson, in a lower voice, to a very unintelligent-looking elderly person beside her. "I knew that would put her back up! She hates Sophy like poison; but nothing like she hates Sophy's beau."

"If she hates Sophy's beau, I don't see why she should hate Sophy," said the unintelligent friend, in a matter-of-fact voice. "Of course, girls will be girls; but I don't see the common-sense of that; because, if she hates him, she can't want to have him."

"Oh, that's not Dora; she would never cut off her nose to spite her face—trust her father's daughter for that! She'd forgive him enough to take him, if he'd have her, fast enough; but what sort of a time he'd have afterwards, I don't know."

"But why does she hate him?"

"Well, you *do* go about with your head in a bag, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Johnson, who did not. "Don't you know that? Well, one day last month Mr. Blake was at the Club, and a lot of young fellows were chaffing him about Miss de Jongh; and, by and by, Dora Solomon's name came up, too. They said her brains and old Solomon's business—and it's always my belief that Miss Dora knows more about the working of that than she gets credit for—would be worth more, in the long-run, than Sophy's money. And then, Mr.

Blake—you know how he talks—said, ‘That might be, but he must really draw the line at Jewesses.’”

“Dear, dear!” said the friend. She had taken in the whole of this circumstantial narrative with unshaken faith. The story that can prove too improbable, too devoid of evidence, to be received with open arms by South African society must be an amazing one indeed. Probably, it still remains to be told.

“So the young fellow that’s engaged to Adelaide Cohen’s cousin told his girl; and she told Adelaide; and Adelaide told that Miss McKay that teaches Alice Thorne’s little sisters; and Alice is hand and glove with Dora, always in and out, and so it came round to her. And that’s why.”

“Dear, dear!” said the friend again. “It was a nasty thing to have said about one, wasn’t it? He could scarcely have said any different about a colored person.”

“Oh, well! of course, he never thought of its coming round. After all, perhaps, he never did say it; people do put stories about so,” said Mrs. Johnson, with a touch of resigned reprobation. “Well, talk of an angel! Here he is.”

In fact, a general relaxation of tension notified the arrival of Mr. Gerald Blake.

“I must make my humblest apologies, Mrs. Greathead,” he said, easily. “I was on the very point of starting when I was detained.”

“Oh, don’t mention it, Mr. Blake,” said Mrs. Greathead, with shocked deprecation. “I’m sure nobody knows better than me what calls gentlemen in business have on their time. Poor Mr. Greathead used always to tell me and the girls never to count on him for anything—except for meals. Till his health broke down, he used to manage to be wonderfully regular at those. But as for anything else—no; I’m sure we all feel it’s only too good of you to come at all.”

The flutter of assent was so general that it might easily have passed for universal.

Gerald continued his progress, with a few words to each, till he came to Mrs. Johnson. That lady took the initiative. There was a rich exuberance of vulgarity about her that used to make Gerald shudder; but a wholesome dread of her exceptional imaginative powers as a narrator induced him to make more efforts to keep in her good graces than he usually did where his tastes were offended.

“Are your ears burning, Mr. Blake?” she shouted. “Because they ought to be, the way they’ve all been talking about you.”

"I hope nobody was very hard on me," he said, plaintively. "Hadh't I any defenders? Didn't you stand up for me, Miss Greathead?"

Miss Greathead, elaborately patting into shape a dab of muslin on the back of Mrs. Johnson's chair, wished, giggling, to know why she should, indeed?

"Oh! don't you say anything, my dear," cried the terrible old lady. "It's compliments he's fishing for. Wouldn't you like to know what was said? Come!"

"Was it too bad for anybody to tell me?" said Gerald, pathetically. "Mrs. Hofmeyer, won't *you* be plain with me for my good, and let me know?" he said, crossing over to her.

Mrs. Hofmeyer, in secret, gladly would have done so, so far as her part in it was concerned; but she only gave her little outward smile, and that mechanical touch of her hand, which she was able to reduce to even more than the usual unmeaningness.

"Comfort yourself," she said; "I didn't hear any libel."

"The greater the truth the greater the libel, you know," persisted Gerald. "Didn't you hear any truth?"

"Probably not," she said, coolly. She gave an infinitesimal glance towards Mrs. Johnson, whose late anecdote had been but too well pointed by her eyes, though her tones had not reached Mrs. Hofmeyer's ears. "Probably not. We don't come together to talk anything so dull; do you think so? It would be worse than business."

"Oh! why do you say worse?" he said, rather glad of the diversion. "Surely there is nothing so dreadful in what we do here? I call it 'business made easy.' I'm sure it is business made pleasant," he added, with one of his best smiles, turning to embrace the company in a general compliment.

"Indeed, *we* all find it business made pleasant, don't we, ladies?" said Mrs. Greathead as choragus.

And the chorus said they did.

"Miss Thorne, you don't dislike business, do you?" said Gerald.

The two girls sat together, the last of the circle.

"Miss Solomon, you can't, surely? No one could dislike what they do so well."

"I'm glad you think so," said the girl, with a little laugh. It was a curious one; less agreeable than perhaps she would fain have made it. "I shouldn't have guessed it; you're generally rather down upon my suggestions, you know."

Gerald muttered something deprecatory, rather wishing he had held his tongue. She took no heed; any one that understood the situation could have discerned the struggle between temper and policy in every detail of her face and manner.

"No," she said, then, with a sudden resolute good-humor, "the person that really is good at the business—that really does go in for it as if she liked it—won't be here to-day, I'm afraid. Miss de Jongh isn't coming any more, you know."

On her first entrance, she had taken care to fill up the empty chair beyond her with the wrap she had just taken off. Now, as she spoke, she took it up, as if by accident, and threw it over the end of the sofa; yet not so accidentally either as to leave the action entirely unmarked.

"Indeed, you do her no more than justice, Miss Solomon," said Gerald. "Miss de Jongh is a principal under whom it is a pleasure to work. By the bye, she has appointed a lieutenant; I must go and find her out, as the best means left me of showing my obedience."

He strolled away. Dora turned her back on the place of repentance which she had offered and he had refused, looking as though she could have cut off the hand that had offered it. The next moment she was speaking to Alice, in a voice as composed as usual.

"You look a bit lost, Mr. Blake," said Mrs. Johnson, as Gerald stood looking round the room. "Who might you be missing?"

"Is Mrs. Runciman here? Miss de Jongh has passed me on to her, and I am naturally interested."

"Oh, yes, you would be," exclaimed the old lady. She began to chuckle, as at a secret joke. "Well, you'll have to wait a bit; she's gone up with Florrie Greathead to have a look at the pattern of the costume for the helpers at the flower-stall. You know she's one of my lot now; I'm her boss, so you'll have to mind."

She nudged the mild friend beside her, and chuckled louder.

"I don't believe it," said Gerald, gallantly; "I believe it's only printed so to save your feelings, Mrs. Johnson, and that really they have found some one to keep you in order."

"Hark at that!" shrieked the old lady, in a perfect ecstasy. "Mrs. Runciman's coming to boss me up!"

The shout of her laughter was taken up in every variety of tone. It ceased.

"After that—" began Mrs. Johnson. And then somebody laughed outside, and Gerald Blake fairly started. It was as if some celestial mocking-bird, gathering up the too discordant tones within, had

sent them back purified and etherealized into melody. The next moment two girls, coming in together, stood pausing by the open door.

For some reason, Mattie had come down wearing the dainty fancy cap and apron which she had been up to inspect. They were pretty in themselves; and, for her, if an artist had designed them expressly, the effect could scarcely have been improved. It would have been pleasant to see almost any young thing so simply, manifestly delighted, with itself and with the whole situation, as was Mattie. When, to the mere attractiveness of happy youth, was added the beauty, the half voluptuous yet piquant charm, with which every soft line, every pretty preening movement, of this child-woman was instinct, the picture was one not readily to be forgotten.

"I thought you would like to see—" began Mattie. And then, "Oh, Mr. Blake, how d'ye do? I didn't see you were here." She held out her hand with a suppressed giggle. "You didn't expect to see me, now, did you?"

"Miss Williams!" he exclaimed. He was fairly bewildered out of comprehension for a moment.

"Mrs. Runciman, if you please," said that lady.

The pretty, petulant movement of her head was like that of a bird. Her manner betrayed no sign of confusion; she was fairly laughing in his face like a mischievous school-girl. But one brilliant, passing blush did not escape the notice of a pair of dark eyes suddenly become attentive.

The explanations which the faces of every one asked and which Mrs. Johnson's voice loudly called for, were given; and then Mattie bethought her of the rest of her own.

"I was going to say, Mrs. Johnson, that I thought you'd like to see how the things looked on."

"Eh?" cried Mrs. Johnson. "Oh, you'll do, my dear, you'll do. It's not a farthing under five pounds a day you should be worth to the stall, eh?"

Mattie did not trouble herself to try and look as if she did not understand; she dropped her little school courtesy, and laughed aloud. She could have danced, she could have kissed her chaperon. Now that the encounter for which she had been looking for days, ever since she had received the circular, was over, she was in wild spirits; an excitement had taken possession of her, beyond what she realized or understood.

Gerald Blake glanced round the room, and his eyes came back to her.

"It's worth all England to an acre of the Karroo to look at you now," he said in a low voice. And his looks so justified even the fervor of his words that Mattie began to giggle, and blushed again, more vividly than she could have wished.

"Well, I'll take the things off now," she said, rather quickly. "It would be a pity to take the freshness off them."

She went across to the piano, as a safe place to deposit her finery. Gerald followed her.

"Let me help you," he said.

"It's done, thank you," said Mattie, demurely; and in two turns of her deft little hands it was done: cap and apron were off and folded and laid on the top of the pile of music. Then she looked at him provokingly and laughed.

"She's prettier than ever," thought Gerald; "and, by Jove, how she has come on!"

And so she had, terribly; yet naturally enough too.

"You won't be able to do without me, by and by, you know," he said, aloud; or, at least, loud enough for her. "Miss de Jongh said I was to do business with you just the same as I do with her."

"Oh, and how is that?" giggled Mrs. Runciman; and, somehow, he could not feel such absolute certainty of the simplicity of the question as to be quite so ready as usual with his reply.

"She tells me what to do, and I do it," he said, ultimately, with innocent humility. "I am very obedient."

"You've changed a lot, then," retorted Mattie, with a delightful pertness. "But if that's it, you'll have an easy time with me, because I don't really know anything about it, you see; I never was at a bazaar in all my life."

"You delight me!" he exclaimed. "This is better and better. You have taste—"

"Who told you that?"

"Why should I want any one to tell me? You have the taste, and I have the experience. We are like the blind and the lame man in the story; we can't either manage without the other, I assure you."

"Oh, I know that old story; it was in our reading-books at school. But it has nothing to do with this, anyway."

"Oh, but I think it has. I would like it to have," he said, insinuatingly.

"Folks can't always get what they like in this world," said Mrs. Runciman, sententiously.

"You needn't tell me that," said Gerald. He spoke most unnecessarily low; but this did not prevent him from giving the fullest and most suggestive emphasis to every syllable of his remark. Nor were his eyes inefficient as a commentary.

She simply laughed; not the faintest touch of consciousness could he flatter himself with, even in imagination. If she had blushes to spare for unfeigned admiration, it was evident that she had none for mock sentiment. If she had learned nothing else since they parted, she had learned, at least, how genuine passion looks and sighs and speaks.

Gerald felt a little disgusted at his failure; just enough so to put him on his honor, to himself, to get something more of a response out of her before he had done. For the present, he thought it best to laugh too.

And just then Mrs. Hofmeyer was heard saying, in a tone of penetrative meekness,

"And *now*, don't you think we might get to business?"

Mr. Blake followed Miss de Jongh's lieutenant to a chair, and business began.

If Gerald did not find it pleasant indeed that afternoon, his looks, his manner, very much belied him. It soon appeared that Mrs. Runciman did really know very little about the affairs she was supposed to be directing. This necessitated a great deal of private and particular explanation; and, not to disturb the general business of the meeting, this had to be given in an undertone; and this, again, necessitated sitting very close to his director, suddenly become his disciple.

Presently there came some question of decoration—a matter of folds and draperies—and Mrs. Runciman's little red shawl came into requisition; and Mr. Blake took much trouble to drape it over the back of Mrs. Runciman's chair. He actually had to kneel down by it to get it really artistic; and then he took his work to pieces, and she had to do it again, to show she understood; and she could not manage it, so he was obliged to guide her hands; and then—then Mattie suddenly tossed the shawl on to the floor, and declared she could understand a lot better just by listening, and folded her hands on her lap very demurely, and began to listen very hard. And Gerald sat up, and pulled his moustache, and looked pleased with himself; and, without prejudice to his attention to Miss de Jongh's substitute, made himself extra agreeable to the general public for the rest of the afternoon.

Dora Solomon sat on the sofa, and showed very little of her head for business. She remained quite silent; with her arm resting against the head of the couch, and her cheek resting on her hand, she sat looking across the room, with a sort of inward, concentrated gaze—a look strangely dispassionate to go with such a temperament.

“What’s the matter, Dora?” said Alice Thorne, at last, giving her a little push.

“Nothing; what should there be? Why do you ask?”

“Because you look just like you do when you are playing chess.”

“Do you play chess, Miss Solomon?” asked Mrs. Hofmeyer. She spoke with a certain curiosity.

Dora laughed, a little awkwardly.

“Oh! now and then,” she said.

“Oh, Mrs. Hofmeyer,” exclaimed Alice, who was that doubtful blessing—a devout worshipper. “Why, she has beaten Monty Lyons at it before now; and there’s only three men in Kimberley can do that.”

“What nonsense you do talk, Alice!” said the other girl, very sharply. Then she recovered herself. “It’s not much compliment to be told that you look wisest when you are half asleep,” she said laughing, “and that’s what *I* was. Goodness! how dull it is. Well, I suppose I must keep awake to do my duty by Sophy.”

She took out a little memorandum book and a pencil.

“Tell me if anything has been settled yet, there’s a good girl,” she said; “and I’ll make a note of that before I go on. Sophy made me promise faithfully to write her a full account of what was done at every meeting.”

“Well, you won’t need to write to-day,” said Alice, “because nothing has been settled, or seems likely to be, any different to what there was before.”

“That is no matter,” said Dora, absently. She had turned to listen to some pronouncement of Mrs. Greathead’s, and was entering it in her note-book. “It will be better to write,” she went on, as she set down the information she had acquired in a firm, marked hand; “you know, it does take a lot of telling to get anything into poor Sophy’s head. I dare say she doesn’t clearly know what was settled last time.”

CHAPTER XIV

TOWARDS evening, some three or four days after the bazaar meeting, Jesse Runciman was walking homewards across the veld. As he walked along—his head slightly thrown back, his step quick and decided, his whole bearing a trifle too superior, too aggressive—he was as little like the man who, in fear and trembling, and bitterness of conscience, had left Beulah a few short weeks ago, and as much like the self-confident, somewhat dictatorial Jesse Runciman of the old days as his worst enemy could have desired.

His inner history since his departure had been much what might have been expected. All too soon he had begun to breathe that atmosphere of subtle flattery which had been the bane of his whole life, ever since a sensational (though, to his own consciousness, agonizingly genuine) "conversion" at the age of fourteen had made him an object of exulting interest to the whole of the Cape branch of the Primitive Gossellers.

Not but what he got plenty of exhortation; but he must have been really stupid not to feel that it was to his superiors' sense of duty he owed it, not to their fears. It did him more harm than good: it was so easy to accept, humbly and gratefully, warnings and exhortations which were all entirely wide of the mark, so far as his real faults and dangers were concerned.

By the end of three weeks of this treatment all sense of any special individual unfitness had been lost, swallowed up in an ocean of generalities. Of such general unworthiness, indeed, he had a terrific sense enough; to set himself too low a standard was never one of his failings. He passed his last night in Cape Town—the night which closed the Sunday of his public recognition—in one of his worst fits of nervous horror. It was but an abstract, nightmare agony, unfortunately; that piercing pang of self-revealing light, which had brought him at once so much keener and so much more healthful suffering, was not to be so easily granted to him again. Such as it was, however, it had at least had the effect of making him desperately watchful over himself in every way for

the first days of his new start. But his very success seemed doomed to injure him; already he would have been prepared to marvel at his own old fears.

Nothing was less present to his mind this evening than doubts or fears of any kind. He felt curiously excited, elated: a little *fey*, perhaps? Long months afterwards he remembered that strange, causeless mood of exaltation.

Presently he stopped in his walk and looked about him. It was a desolate sort of prospect, and Runciman stood, perhaps, at its dreariest point. He stood in the midst of a deserted kraal. The dozen or so of round mud huts, like so many ant-hills which were dotted about in twos and threes, showed no sign of life; a lean out-cast of a dog went prowling and sniffing about among the heaps of refuse which had accumulated there; only a few scraggy sheep in a distant hollow cropped the unsucculent vegetation with a despondent crunch.

There was nothing particularly romantic in the circumstances of the desertion; the huts had been vacated at the time when a very judicious enactment obliged the native laborers to live in the compounds. Yet no abstract knowledge of this fact could quite do away with a certain unique impressiveness about this dead hamlet, lit up by the last strong splendors of dying day; this little bit of debatable ground between civilization and barbarism abandoned, here in the waste, by both.

Through the centre of the kraal an old half-obliterated cart-track led away into the sunset; the sides of the heavy ruts were falling in, and the dull-colored, sapless spikes of the vegetation of the Kar-roo had grown over them here and there, blotting them out. And beyond and all around stretched the open veld as far as the eye could reach, an undulating monotony, the little koppies standing up here and there like tumuli, all color and all shadow, vivid and metallic, under the molten gold of the sinking sun, the light striking like something solid upon veld and kraal.

Away on the left the faint, palpitating blueness of the southward sky was broken and barred by the skeleton lines of cranes and pulleys, marking the position of one of the mines. They stood out black and clear and gaunt; there was a certain grimness of suggestion about those interlacing, complicated silhouettes of bars and chains and wheels.

Runciman stood and looked across the desert solitude into the blinding glories of the west; and as he looked, right between him

and the sunset there rose above the summit of one of the mounds the gigantic figure of a man. The figure stood a moment—a statue of dark bronze, discernible only in mass against the golden background of the sky; imposing in a degree, not by beauty of form or attitude, but by a certain rough-hewn massiveness, a Cyclopean breadth of effect.

“A giant among men,” Runciman muttered to himself instinctively; and with the sound of his own words his eyes were opened, and he started a step forward with a scarcely suppressed cry.

Then he stopped. He stood watching the adversary come on, with that easy, rather indolent, stride of his hours of relaxation; to Runciman his very gait looked like a defiance. He breathed more quickly; the excitement which had strung his nerves and quickened his pulses all the afternoon had, then, received an explanation. This was his hour; the veld was an arena; the heavens were full of eyes—not so much eyes of watchers solicitous as exultant; conflict there might be, indeed, but conflict of which the result was a foregone conclusion.

Nearer and nearer; the long black shadow that preceded him, staining the glowing spaces of the veld with a moving blot, touched Jesse's feet. With an instinctive movement the young minister raised his foot and trampled on the advancing darkness. The next moment he had moved a little to one side, setting himself right across Westoby's path.

“Wait,” he said. He put up one hand, with the old school-master gesture of command; his tone confessed not to the recognition of any possibility of disobedience. “Wait; I have a word to speak with you.”

It seemed for a scarcely perceptible instant that Westoby hesitated—was about to pass on. Then apparently he changed his mind. He stopped, as requested; but not with the manner of one who intends discussion.

“Well,” he said, rather grimly, “I don't happen to have anything to say to you; and if you know when you're in luck's way you'll thank your stars for that same. I've not forgotten you, don't you be afraid; and I did vow once you should remember me the longest day you lived. But I'm willing to let you off this time. I've got other fish to fry than to be bothering after a piece of cheek eighteen months old. Hold your jaw, then; go your way, and look to it that it don't cross mine, and I'll keep out of yours. That's spoken fair, and it ain't going to be spoken twice.”

"Keep your forgiveness for those who are afraid of your threats," said Runciman, with his head high. "I value neither. Peace! When such as you begin to speak of peace, it is time for the Lord's servant to make him ready to battle."

Westoby looked at him with a sort of amusement.

"You young idiot!" he exclaimed, impatiently, but quite without violence. "What will you run your head against a wall for? Haven't I told you I don't want to get up a row? Don't be a fool; take my advice and let well alone;" then, as the other made a gesture of scornful interruption, "let ill alone, then; just as you like to put it. See here! I know well enough you think I'm the devil, or not far off. Then don't you rile me into taking the whip-hand of you; you mightn't care for the road I'd be taking you, and yet 'needs must,' you know, 'when the devil drives.'"

"So his servants say," said Runciman, rather contemptuously. "I am in other service, in other keeping. I am myself but a weak believer, an unprofitable servant, even as a man that hath no strength." (His tone by no means bore out the humility of his words.) "But *I* have never found it so," he concluded, with really amazing oblivion.

"Haven't you?" said Westoby, coolly. "Then I'm thinking that's because he's never yet held the ribbons. I'd advise you never to give him the chance."

It was noticeable about this man that, with all his personal defiance of every spiritual power, with all his audacity and profanity, he yet never spoke exactly as an unbeliever; in fact, he was not one. The man of action seldom is; the ruler born, perhaps never; and Westoby was both.

He nodded easily as he spoke, and was passing on. Once more Runciman barred his path.

"Listen to me," he said; and there was an urgent imperiousness in his tone which could not but arrest attention to some extent. "It will be better for you in the end; better to have it spoken now in the ear than to have it proclaimed upon the house-tops. There is no other choice. Because speak I will. Months ago this message was given me for you, and woe unto me if I proclaim it not! If you won't hear, others shall; and that speedily."

This time Westoby did swear fiercely.

"I know no more what you mean than I reckon you do yourself!" he exclaimed. "But if you will have it, take your own way! No chap that wanted to hang himself ever had to complain *I* didn't

give him rope enough. Here I am, then!" He threw himself down on the dry earth, in the midst of the forlorn kraal, leaning his back against one of the deserted huts. There was less carelessness in the move than there appeared to be. "Now, out with your—message!" he said; "and cut it as short as you can, you were best."

"It is short," said Runciman—"short enough."

He paused; and what emotions, what anticipations filled up that pause he himself could not have told. Only when he did speak his voice, his manner, had a certain solemnity which, considering the tremendous nature of what he was saying, was at least more becoming than the sort of "triumphant insultation" which had marked both voice and manner hitherto.

"Thus came the word of the Lord unto me, for thee," he said: "Behold, thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground."

The movement with which Westoby drew himself into an attitude of greater attention was too deliberate to be accused as startled.

"If that's meant for a joke," he said, slowly, "it's a kind I don't particularly care for. If it isn't, I don't know what you mean."

And, in fact, his denouncer was so young, had, he knew, led a life so circumscribed, that Westoby really did doubt whether he was not trying to make a sensation by some strong figure of speech.

"He that was a murderer from the beginning is also the father of lies," said Jesse, bitterly. "I might have expected this. But it will not serve your turn."

The wretched pariah dog had come sneaking into sight round one of the huts. Westoby snatched up a potsherd that lay beneath his hand, and flung it at the poor brute with a tremendous curse; but it was the only relief he allowed himself. Towards his opponent he kept a strong hand on his temper; he had not yet heard as much as he thought well.

"You don't know what I mean?" the younger man went on, with more excitement. "Are your hands, then, perhaps so used to blood that you have a choice of the meanings you might put to my words?"

Still Westoby answered nothing.

"You thought that this sin, at least, would never find you out; that I can well believe. It was only a poor native—a black," continued Runciman, with intense bitterness—"a man without a friend. So because he dared to serve his Maker better than you, the white

man, his master, chose, you rose up and smote him and slew him, and went your way."

"So?" said Westoby. He spoke slowly, thoughtfully, pulling a little at his beard. From that time he made no pretence at indifference any more; he sat, openly watchful, and never took his eyes off Jesse's face. "So?" he repeated.

"Ah!" cried the other, triumphantly. "Now, then, perhaps you understand. Only see, now, how friendless was this man, who has the Lord Himself for his avenger! See, now, how this sin—committed, as you thought, in the dark places of the ends of the earth—has been brought home to you! Did you ever think of him again—your false witness? your wretched tool?"

Westoby bent forward a little, his eyes attentive as before.

"A tramp, a miserable outcast, why did he not die the dog's death he deserved, alone, unheeded, in any ditch, any corner of the veld? Why, when the pains of hell gat hold upon him, and the terrors of death were overwhelming him, why was *I* brought to hear the cry of his confession, wrung from a conscience you might well have thought as dead as your own; I who knew you, who could little fail to recognize you again? Why was all this?" he cried.

Westoby remained silent.

"Ah!" continued Jesse; and now the full tide of his indignation, his triumph, his almost personal joy in the day of vengeance swept up and bore him away—"ah! you, who thought yourself so secure!" he cried; "who said in your heart, 'There shall no harm happen unto me!' Where are they now, all your proud boastings? Will you cease now, perhaps, to trouble the Lord's heritage? Ah! you, who were so gracious in warning *me*, forsooth, in sparing *me*!" He laughed aloud. "Had you not better be looking to yourself?"

"Take care," said Westoby, very quietly.

"Take you care!" cried Jesse, more passionately than before. "This is no language any more from you to me. Put rather your face in the dust"—he pointed downwards, with a gesture of passionate exultation—"put your face in the dust if so there may be any hope! Ay! lay your body as the ground, and as the street to them that pass over! Enemy of the Lord, created only for this day of vengeance! laughing-stock of His people! slave of the meanest of His servants! Do you not see, then, yet that He has delivered you into my hand? Your liberty, your very life—"

In that instant Westoby was on his feet.

"Fool!" he cried.

There was that in his voice which made itself heard and felt through all the tumult of that triumphant defiance. There was anger in it—furious anger; but it was not this that arrested more than Runciman's attention—even the whole torrent of his excitement. It was the immense, the uncontrollable scorn that breathed in it; by that tone the mere contemptuous word seemed to be made to blast and scathe like something tangible.

"So this was the mighty matter that was to make me your slave, your laughing-stock—that was what you said, I reckon; I don't forget. My liberty! my life! Why, you miserable, muddle-headed fool!" he said, "that d——d nigger's carcass itself could do me as much harm as you can."

There fell a silence: one of those silences which are not to be computed by time. The sun had gone down; the west, all one red, was barred here and there with level lines of purple cloud. There were no more shadows now; the time had come when all the world was shadow.

Jesse spoke.

"That," he said, still holding his head high, but with less confidence than before, "that we shall prove."

"Go and prove it, by all means!" said Westoby, as before. "Go and shout it in the Market Square, if that'll make you feel any better; don't mind for me. It'll make a thundering big sensation there, I reckon! Folks out here just run mad over a nigger, more or less, sent to the devil a bit sooner than he'd have gone anyhow, don't they? Take your —— story to the lawyer chaps, if you like. They'll ask you for evidence—that's no odds; you've got witnesses, of course, haven't you? Anyway, you'll have had that precious scoundrel's story properly taken down and signed and witnessed, won't you?"

Silence alone answered him; it was answer enough. Brought face to face with actualities, already Jesse was becoming bewildered. His nerve began to go; it was, indeed, of that order to which defeat means demoralization—swift, complete, inevitable.

In a certain cowed slackening of every line and curve Westoby could read a tale which he could well interpret. Native blood had paid such visible homage to him before, and he knew how to follow up his advantage.

"And you dared!" he thundered, suddenly releasing all hold on his temper, "you darned, impudent, low-bred cur of a white-

skinned nigger!—you dared to stand up to me! to come the boss over me!” He seized his enemy by the collar with a grasp in which Jesse was as helpless as a child, and shook him till earth and sky seemed all one vibrating blackness. “By the Lord!” he cried, “I’ll teach you better! Go to —, and tell your black brother who sent you!”

His other hand was already at Jesse’s throat; and then, all in a minute, he had won.

Among his acquaintance Jesse Runciman probably passed for a brave man. As a matter of fact, of mere animal courage when unsustained by excitement he had very little; his courage was a mood like other moods, not an inherent organic possession. He might have gone openly to the stake for his principles like a hero; a violent death—purposeless, lonely, brutal—he could not face even, as Westoby would have expressed it, like a gentleman. Now, physically giddy and tremulous with the effects of Westoby’s bodily violence, giddy and confounded mentally with the first taunt of race that had ever been levelled at himself—a taunt which somehow seemed to have evoked in him a consciousness of that very inferiority which Westoby implied in it—his nerve gave way altogether. He caught at his assailant’s arm with both his hands, and clung to it with a grasp which, desperate though it was, would have been futile enough if the other man had been more in earnest.

“No!” he cried, helplessly, with a sort of sob in his voice, “don’t, for the love of heaven! I—I can’t die like this.”

Westoby simply tightened his grasp a little.

“I—I beg your pardon for—for anything I said that—I didn’t mean—”

Westoby dropped one hand, retaining his hold with the other, but more easily.

“Oh, if that’s to be the tune for the future, my young fighting-cock,” he said, grimly enough, but more quietly, “well, you’ve just saved yourself by the skin of your teeth—by the skin of your teeth,” he repeated, slowly weighing out each syllable. “There, get along with you!” he said, suddenly. He let go his hold with a roughness which sent the other staggering backwards as if it had been a push. He stumbled up against one of the huts and stood there, really incapable for the time of standing without its support.

“I ain’t going to do it this time,” continued Westoby. “Mind your own business, and I don’t want to do it at all; but if ever you’re in a hurry to make acquaintance with kingdom come, just

you come to me with your cheek again, and if wringing your neck will do the job, why I'll oblige you, or my name's not Tom Westoby."

He paused. Jesse could not hide, had not even the spirit left to try to hide, the irrepressible nervous shudder which shook him as he stood. The hour of shame might be to come; just now he was as much subdued beyond even feeling shame as any native to whom this white man was so obviously and naturally lord and master as to leave no more room for humiliation, in even abject submission, than humanity may feel at abasing itself before deity.

"So, now," continued Westoby, "you'd best be getting along home to that pretty little white wife of yours. Ay! it would have been hard-luck never to have seen her any more, wouldn't it?"

"Don't!" cried Jesse again, imploringly.

"Well, you're right enough to feel you've got something there worth living for; and if you've any sense left, you'll be minding that instead of meddling with me. They're kittle cattle at best; ay, even when they're your own breed. And you—well, I reckon you've not got the plainest sort of sailing before *you*."

Jesse moved uneasily, his fingers locking and unlocking, twitched with restless nervous motions, like those of a woman.

"What—" he began, faintly.

"What do I know about it? Only what keeping his eyes open will teach any one about a woman by the end of three weeks—any one that isn't quite a fool, and that ain't entered for the stakes himself; that, of course."

Jesse made a motion as if to speak; then again; but nothing came. What, indeed, could he say who, for those stakes of which the other spoke so lightly, was ready to enter nothing less than his soul?

"See here, now," continued Westoby; "you being you, and she being she, it don't want a conjuror to guess that you ain't making the running just like you could wish. And it might be that I—knowing a bit of you and she both—could do you a good turn some day in that line. What a fool you'd be rather to get yourself knocked on the head for the good of the next comer! And that's the end of being at loggerheads with me—and the sure end, too!"

His voice became menacing again for a moment; then he went up to Jesse and clapped a hand on his shoulder. "But you won't be such a fool!" he said. "Come, we've played it out, fair and square; you licked first, now I have. We're just where we were before we ever met at all; there's nothing to do now but just to shake hands. You'll do that, I reckon?"

He held out his great rough hand ; Jesse Runciman put his into it, and if he had certainly known that he was therewith delivering over his soul, he would scarcely at this moment have found power to refuse a request which was equivalent to a command.

He put his hand in that of Westoby ; the next instant Westoby was striding away across the veld towards the north, and Jesse standing there in the darkness, his fingers tingling almost to pain with the pressure of the giant's grasp ; of himself, the world, or what had happened he had scarcely any understanding at all.

CHAPTER XV

Two little letters in a scrawling school-girl hand ; a marker in her Bible ; a string of spiral alabaster white shells from Somerset Strand, knotted together with a blue ribbon, which hung on the wall near her bed—these, and such as these, were all that was left to Sarah Arkwright of her little girl. These of things tangible and visible ; of other things plain to her alone, the echo haunting all her heart : of bird-like laughter, of a brisk, bustling patter of footsteps, light as a child's ; the memory of a little curly head nestled in her bosom, of kisses with which half-saucy, half-pleading, wholly loving lips had stopped "Grannie's" remonstrances, even while begging her forgiveness—memories of all that mothers bereaved must miss without a mother's recognized right to mourn.

When she stood at the school-house gate, and watched the cart which carried Mattie from her disappear ; when the last flutter of the traveller's handkerchief had become also but a memory, she felt for a moment as if she could bear no more. She turned with an unconscious gesture, instinct with that forlornness which at the last had even dried up her tears, and saw Sam watching her with a sort of awkward wistfulness. The next moment he was looking elaborately into space and whistling abstractedly. But she had seen, and her heart reproached her for selfishness, much as a mother's might do for shadowing with uncomprehended grief the spirit of her child. She came up to him, and laid her hand gently on his arm.

"Don't mind about me, Sam," she said, soothingly, as it were ; "I'm not going to fret."

He looked very much relieved.

"That's right, missus," he said, cheerily, but not exactly unsympathetically. "It's hard lines saying good-bye and all that, ain't it? such chums as you and she were, too; but you've got something left, haven't you?"

He wanted to say "somebody," but did not dare; he had never yet summoned up courage sufficient to make even so much love as this to his wife.

"I have many more mercies than I deserve, I know," said Sarah, humbly; but if at that moment they were not actively present to her mind in detail, perhaps she will not be counted a very grievous hypocrite. "Shall we go home?" she said. "It seems rather empty here—and it is getting cold."

In fact, the sun had dipped behind the mountains; the sudden, strange chill of parting day, liker to death than is anything else in Nature, struck upon the air. Even as she spoke Sam was wrapping a shawl round her shoulders, with a look of conscious pride in his forethought. She started a little in surprise as she felt the warmth.

"How good you are to me always," she said, gratefully.

"Don't," he said, rather gruffly; "I wish you wouldn't talk like that."

"Not thank you?" she said, smiling faintly. "You wouldn't have me ungrateful, I'm sure."

He gave a rather vicious kick to a pebble lying in his path.

"Oh, gratitude be hanged!" he muttered—a remark of which she could not at all understand the spirit, though she had schooled herself to hear the form without any outward sign of discomposure.

They came to the gate. Suddenly she faltered, yet it was scarcely of herself she was thinking then. She stretched out her hands towards the spot where Mattie had disappeared.

"Oh! God bless her!" she cried; "bless my Mattie! Preserve her going out and her coming in; keep her under the shadow of Thy wings! Oh! let no harm happen unto her, nor any evil thing come near her dwelling!" She clasped her hands upon the gate-post and bowed her face upon them in a renewed passion of tears. "Oh! I am blind; I am all in the dark," she sobbed. "I don't know what she is going to; I don't know what to ask for her—only God bless her, God bless her! There is nothing more at all, but only that. Oh! I know that's everything; if my heart is so proud, so wicked as to think she'd be any safer, any better off for being with me, I deserve that she should go! But, oh! my Mattie, my little girl, that never went right away from me in all her life before!"

She had raised her head ; in default of any other human creature who would be likely to understand the outpouring of her heart, she turned her tearful eyes upon her husband.

Perhaps it was a little hard on Sam. All her unflinching obedience and dutifulness, all her gratitude and considerateness seemed to him just then of little account—mere stones for bread, so long as he felt that he had no real interest in her heart, no such interest as had the light-headed, light-hearted girl who, to the looker-on, seemed to give little indeed in return for so much devotion.

"Oh! don't you bother about her, old lady!" he said; "she'll be all right, you bet. I should think she was a sort that would manage to get along well anywhere."

There had never been much love lost between Samuel Arkwright and Mattie Runciman; they were constitutionally antipathetic. Yet Sam really tried to make the remark sound kindly and consolatory; but he was a very poor dissembler, and Sarah's instinct in this matter had all the sensitive delicacy of a lover's. She did not go so far as to resent his failure. But with a patience too long used to disappointment even to think of sighing, she drew back once more within herself; from that day forward there would be yet another chamber in her soul where, with her joy or with her bitterness, she would have to sit alone.

"Yes, she has a happy heart, my Mattie," she said, trying to smile; and that was almost the last time she ever spoke of Mattie in his presence.

The gate shut behind them; she walked on a few yards in silence, drying the last of her now quiet tears. Then she looked up at him.

"There; I've done," she said. "The worst is over now."

She did not suspect that the worst was to come, and to come slowly, with imperceptible yet daily increase of desolation. Solitary confinement is a cumulative torture, so to speak, and Sarah's whole life now had entered into silence. She had never even imagined a loneliness so complete as that which compassed her about in these days.

To have had the hope that Mattie had would have filled her life to overflowing—would have taken the sting from every parting, the loneliness from a heart bereaved of every friend on earth. But to her it had not been given. The first pang of jealousy Sarah had ever known in her life shot through her heart on the day, not many weeks since, when Mattie had whispered her secret with her face hidden on her friend's breast. Sarah was glad that it was hidden.

Left alone, she wept and prayed herself into resignation, finally into an unselfish content. She did her best, but the emotion remained all too pale for joy.

"I shall be 'Grannie,' really, when Mattie's baby comes," she said to herself, with a smile whose patience was a little more sad than tears.

That night it had chanced that Mr. Glasse had chosen to begin upon the book of Samuel for reading and exposition. Of the exposition, dutifully though she listened as a rule, Sarah for once heard but little. The story itself she heard as she had never heard it before, with every most human fibre of her woman's heart wrung and thrilling. That day she herself had wept with Hannah.

"'Why is thy heart grieved?'" repeated the minister, in the deliberate, conventionally pitched tones at once of age and habit. "'Am I not better to thee than ten sons?'" Sarah glanced across at Sam, who sat looking with painful propriety at nothing in particular, and marvelled. "'Better to thee than ten sons?' Could any husband really be that to any wife? 'And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore.'"

But for the first time in her need Sarah did not dare to pray, lest even that utterance to her longing might break down her hard-won resignation into some cry all too passionate: "'Give me children, or I shall die.'"

It may be owned that there was nothing in the situation that called for the surrender of all personal hopes with which she met it; but Sarah had long been more unhappy even than she quite knew herself. She had reached the point at which it seems wiser not to begin to hope, since not to expect is at least not to be disappointed.

The very work itself to which she had so looked forward was one element in her disappointment. By degress she had made a little for herself, gathering up such odds and ends as even the perverse ingenuity of Mr. Glasse could find no pretence for refusing her. In point of fact, she was not fitted for the work. There was no question here of any soul-stirring conversion, no thought of persecution or opposition of any kind, no call on the active side of faith and courage. In certain cases, indeed—cases of sickness, or bereavement, or extreme old age, when animal life is lowest, and some kind of reality is forced upon even the most superficial—she had more success than many, and it was in such ministrations as these that she found her now rare moments of happiness. But under ordinary cir-

cumstances her temperament made her incapable of dealing with these natures — emotional, affectionate, glib, but hopelessly invertebrate, with truth an unknown quantity even among the most religious, and self-respect only one degree above truth, what could she make of them? She, to whom the doctrine of racial inferiority was a heresy, and any attempt at government founded on such doctrine little less than a sin?

She did not lose her faith; but faith was no longer synonymous with joy, and with the loss of her joy Sarah felt a drain upon her spiritual strength such as she had never known before. For one thing, her patience with Mr. Glasse began to fail to a degree that shocked and surprised her. Certainly, he had not improved in his treatment of her. He was not making the slightest effort against his prejudice; perhaps he was past the age when such an effort could have availed in any case. Adaptability is scarcely to be looked for at sixty-eight. He had never forgiven Sarah for having been the unconscious cause of that first and last quarrel with Sam which had half broken his heart. Not daring to provoke a scene with him again, the old minister became quite an accomplished hypocrite; in his son's presence never a word of reproof or complaint to his son's wife passed his lips. Sam had not the least idea of what the poor girl had to suffer during the long hours of his daily absence.

"If you would only tell me *how* to do right, father!" she would exclaim, in despair. "You say I'm not making a happy home for Sam. If you'd only tell me what to do!"

"That's not a question a wife ought to need to put to anybody," returned the minister, with dignity. "There's feelings, or there ought to be, in the heart of every woman that *loves* her husband" (Sarah's eyelids dropped with a little sigh) "as should be a plain guide to her as to what he wants without asking any third parties. It was a pleasure to *me* once to think of these things; but never mind that. Don't think I'm coming interfering between husband and wife. I know my place better than that, I should hope!"

"Oh! what have I done that you should be so cruel to me? You're kind, you're good to everybody in the place except me; and I've not deserved it— Oh! I can't think I have. Why did I ever come here at all?"

Mr. Glasse would have been very glad of an answer to the same question on his own account. Why, indeed? But he chose to resent it—from her.

"If it comes to questioning Providence," he said, "of course I'll say no more. There's some folks never do seem to know when they are well off."

"How can I think it well? You two were happy before I came; and now— I never made mischief in all my life before; God forgive me if I am boasting, but I never did. And now I never seem able to keep clear of it."

"Oh! it's not *your* fault, of course; ask your husband, else. Never mind. There's a little place just outside the village," said the minister, with a chastened air, "as I've had in my mind for some time past. It's humble, but when it's been cleaned up a bit it'll be as good a place for a poor old fellow as has wore out his welcome to end his days in as any other. Likely it won't be long before even that'll be a deal finer and larger than he'll be needing any more at all. I'll go and see about it to-morrow. I dare say Sam 'll run down and see me sometimes in the evenings when you can spare him. You'll not be afraid of that?"

This had been quite a sudden inspiration a few weeks before, but it had proved to be an inspiration of genius. So far it had lost none of its effect.

"Oh! father," sobbed Sarah, "don't, don't talk like that! If praying and trying can make things any different—and surely, surely they must by-and-by—I'll make you happy yet. Only don't do that! Father, you won't say anything to Sam about going away? You won't, father? Oh! promise me that!"

So matters would be patched up time after time. But Sarah's moral sense was too healthy to allow her to take all the blame of these miserable scenes on herself. Then, deep down in some corner of her heart, she began to think that, in some way or other, Sam ought to save her from them. It is true she did her very best to keep him from suspecting her unhappiness; therefore, perhaps, it was a little illogical of her to feel that he ought to have guessed it. But it is ill asking logic from a woman's sore heart.

Well, duty remained to her; she had never failed in that. She was yet to learn how hard bare duty may come to be in a relationship which Nature has intended for something more. That lesson, too, was not long delayed. It was taught her on the day when she went with Sam to pay their first formal call on Mrs. Reeves.

It had not been till nearly a month after Mattie's departure that this lady arrived to reign in her stead. The most sympathetic person could scarcely have prevented this from being a trying visit to

Sarah, and Mrs. Reeves was not sympathetic. She was a well-looking little woman of about thirty, very compact and bright and hard—a regular townswoman, who felt herself in banishment, and was at no special pains to hide her sentiments. In the sanctity of private life her husband called her Tilly; in more nervous and less expansive moments, such as the present, he addressed her as Mrs. Reeves, and did not seem too sure how she would take even so much familiarity as that. Already the look, the whole atmosphere, of the place had been changed beyond recognition.

Sarah, never much of a talker, grew more silent in a sort of confusion between the ghosts of the old and the hard reality of the new. Conversation languished considerably, for even Sam himself, when feeling circumscribed in the matter of slang, made but a poor show in comparison with his usual form.

Presently Mr. Reeves asked Sarah whether she had heard from Mrs. Runciman since she had been at Kimberley.

"Mrs. Runciman was a very old and dear friend of Mrs. Arkwright's," he explained to his wife, for no reason beyond pure nervousness.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Reeves, civilly uninterested.

"We must try and do our best to prevent her from feeling the change to be a loss—the alteration to be altogether a calamity," added Mr. Reeves, as an amendment, after a pause in which his nervousness grew clamorous.

"Mattie wrote to me once, soon after they had settled in," said Sarah, timidly, after another gap of silence into which Mrs. Reeves had not thrown herself with the alacrity which such a suggestion as that of her well-intentioned lord required. "I hope she will be very happy; she wrote as if she was."

"I don't know but what *I* could be in her place," said Mrs. Reeves, dryly.

"I hope you will be happy in this one, ma'am," said Sarah, feeling as though she somehow owed an apology; "I'm sure we shall all try our best to make you so."

"Thanks," said Mrs. Reeves, politely, but without effusion.

"Mrs. Reeves has not been accustomed to the seclusion of the country," explained the school-master, pacifically. "She will soon learn to appreciate the many advantages of rural life."

If Mrs. Reeves's face meant anything, it meant, "Oh! will she?" But she only said, rather more graciously:

"Well, of course it seems strange to me after a town. But it

certainly is prettier, and house-keeping is wonderfully cheaper than in Cape Town, no doubt."

"And it's cheap there to what it is in Kimberley," put in Sam, by way of something soothing.

"Indeed, I was saying—wasn't I, Mrs. Reeves?" ventured the host, reassured by the appearance of an ally—"I was saying that, merely as regards temporalities, I doubt whether our young friend has bettered his position so much as might be supposed."

"If you mean the supply of the needful," said Sam, "I should think there wasn't a doubt but what he's changed for the worse. What did he ever need to put his hand in his pocket for, here? I expect Mrs. Runciman will want to be a good manager to make out at all, up there."

"Well, you may put things so, of course; but it does give position, to be a minister," said Mrs. Reeves, rather discontentedly. "But some people have no ambition," she added, with a glance at her husband, which he did not seem to feel reassuring. "There's people who would be content to go on like a horse in a mill, till they're as slow and good-for-nothing as he is, provided they were left enough in peace to grow fat."

"My dear," suggested Mr. Reeves, deprecatingly, "there is no question which is not susceptible of being regarded from two points of view, at least. There is no lot so humble but it has its compensations; none so exalted but it has its disadvantages."

"Right you are," said Sam, with an amiable desire to back up his host, whose tone, very ill adapted to his words, seemed to confess a pressing need of support. "It's just about as broad as it's long. It's a fine thing to be a minister, and gives you a lift, in a way, no doubt; but for a mere matter of bread and cheese it's not to be compared to a berth like yours or mine. Rather not!" he concluded in a tone of emphatic satisfaction.

Mrs. Reeves smiled thinly.

"You are content with the compensations, then, Mr. Arkwright, it seems. I have tried them pretty well all round, I think. I wouldn't mind having a try at the disadvantages, for a change; but I'm never likely to get a chance."

Mr. Reeves laughed, nervously and conciliatingly.

Sarah sat and listened in silence, and unprotesting even by a look; yet every word jarred upon her soul till silence was almost pain. Position; money! It did not occur to her then that Mattie's way of considering the matter had been little more exalted than that to

which she was listening now. She thought of Jesse Runciman's vigil of fasting and prayer and tears; it seemed as though she should have craved pardon of his memory for the language which was being bandied about so lightly beneath the very roof which had witnessed those outpourings of his soul. And that it should be Sam, her husband, part of herself, who should be parading, with evident satisfaction, the lowest views of all!

CHAPTER XVI

"Oh, Lor'!" said Sam. "Poor old Reeves! Who'd have thought it?"

The ordeal was over; husband and wife were walking homewards together. The short twilight was deepening into night in the thick shadow of the gum-trees in the lane; the evening-star now gleamed, now vanished, amid the branches; the air was laden with the pungent medicinal eucalyptus odor.

"Poor old Reeves!" said Sam, again, and laughed out in the darkness.

Sarah felt the arm which lay in his drawn closer and squeezed a little. Presently his own was round her waist. There came over her, all at once, a sort of impossibility of making any response. Why the strain of months should, just this evening, have come to a climax, it would be hard to say. Sam noticed nothing.

"I've had awful luck, old girl!" he said; "a jolly lot better than I deserve!"

"You're very kind, Sam!" she forced herself to murmur, mechanically. And he was feeling so elate that he allowed a formula which he was beginning to hate to pass without remonstrance.

They came to a spot where a tree that had been cut down lay by the road-side.

"There's no hurry, is there, missus?" said Sam. "Suppose we sit down here a bit—it's such a jolly evening."

He spread his handkerchief elaborately over the log for her. She took her place obediently; it was too nearly dark for her to be obliged to smile. The frogs were clamoring from every ditch and pond for miles round; the voice of their crying—a dull, hurrying

clang of wooden bells, ceaseless, urgent—filled up the silence in which she sat.

"If I've any fault to find with yon, old lady, it's more that I don't hear enough of you than that I hear too much," said Sam.

And at that moment, as she sat with locked lips, her heart seemed bursting with a new desire of speech—such speech as she must never, never address to him; for was not this her husband, for whom, in the mouth of a wife, there must be no reproof?

"I wonder if there could ever have been any talk of running old Reeves for the ministry?" said Sam, after a pause, in which he had been recalling the incidents of the visit. "Seemed to me as if it was rather a sore subject with Mrs. R. Like enough, she thought it was a case of sour grapes with me; she looked as if she did. It wasn't, though. Oh, Lor'!" he exclaimed, with renewed laughter, "fancy *me* a minister!"

He put his hands together, turned up his eyes, and began half-chanting, half-reciting, with immense unction, and that breadth of effect which made him so popular in comic songs at village entertainments:

"Dearly beloved brethren, is it not a sin
To peel a potato, and throw away the skin?"

The woman beside him shivered a little, yet the evening was not cold.

"The potatoes feed the pigs,"

continued Sam, in a tone of affectionate argument,

"And the pigs—"

He broke off, overcome with his own humor.

Then, after a moment, all at once, and without any warning, he said, in a different tone—light enough, but with apparent intention:

"Should you like me to be a minister, old lady?"

"No, Sam."

She spoke with a sort of tension, in a stifled voice.

He seemed to be collecting himself for a great effort of magnanimity.

"If I thought you would like it—very much—"

"I shouldn't. Oh, don't begin to think that!"

"Very well. After all, you know, it's quite true what I said to Mrs. Reeves; we shouldn't be a bit better off in—"

She had been sitting with her face drooping, averted; now she turned it upon him suddenly.

"And if we should be, God forbid that you should do it!" she said; and there was that in her voice which he had never heard before, which was rarely heard at all by any. Her soul needed to be stirred to its very depths before that thrill came into her gentle utterance. "God forbid that any one belonging to me should come to that!—to the curse of coming crouching for a piece of silver; of saying, 'Put me into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread!'"

She paused a moment; she sat with one hand pressed to her heart, as if to stifle at once her pain and its utterance. It was too late for that last; her soul, once unburdened, would tolerate no half-measures of relief.

"Oh, well, I didn't mean—" began Sam, slightly disconcerted. "Of course, I know that's not all the way of looking at it; I know there's a serious part, and all that sort of thing."

"Do you know that?" she asked, with a sort of dreary wonder. "Do you ever think of things so? Oh, Sam, if you ever really did, if you had ever felt your own soul to know it, you couldn't take everything so easy as you do!"

Sam was silent, in sheer bewilderment.

"Oh no, you never have," she went on, more passionately; "things don't mean anything to you. Your ground brings forth plentifully, and you take your ease and are merry; you have never felt need of anything, body or soul. You seem to do by nature the works of grace, and don't see that anything more is wanted. And what will you do in the day when the fire shall try every man's work? The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force; but you—oh, it is all too comfortable and quiet and content; you look at everything too low! It isn't right nor safe!"

She ceased, and there was a moment's pause. She was still too much worked up to begin to feel amazed at her own self; but for Sam that moment of silence was filled with nothing short of blank amazement. He broke it with a long whistle, in which amazement alone as yet found voice.

"Why, Sarah!" he began. Then, quite suddenly, he broke into a sort of ecstasy of laughter. "And I who was as good as saying you scarcely seemed to know you had a tongue in your head

Why, Mrs. Reeves must be for all the world like those chaps that advertise writing to be learned in three lessons, only you've learned the use of your tongue in one. Bully for her!"

He laughed and laughed.

She did not say one other word; only she stood up from where she sat. Perhaps it was the first initiative movement of her married life. Sam got up, too.

"Time to be getting back, missus," he said; and they turned their faces homewards. He made an instinctive movement to give her his arm, as usual; there was no response on her part, and whether she had refused it, or had not observed it, he could not have said. He made no comment or further attempt; but he whistled again very softly, and this time he did not laugh. They walked back, side by side, in silence.

When they reached the house, Sarah went straight in, without a look or word. She stood a moment or so on the stoep, then he followed slowly. The lamp was lighted in the *voor-kammer*, and the *Argus* newspaper, the minister's evening literature, lay open beside his chair, but the old man himself was not there; nor was Sam, at that moment, particularly anxious either to find or be found by him.

There had, in fact, been times of late when—without prejudice to his loyalty or affection to his adoptive father—the young man had been half-conscious of a wish that he could have a house of his own. Which marked a certain amount of development.

He sat down by the table and lit his pipe. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he felt a vague desire to think things out, but he had not yet reached a mental age in which he had the power to put his wish into execution. He did not know how to think. So pretty soon he pulled the newspaper towards him, and began to read in a mechanical, fragmentary sort of way, with little perception of what he read. He sat and read and smoked, and felt a little unhappy, just a very little hurt, and very much puzzled indeed.

Perhaps it was twenty minutes or half an hour that he had been sitting there, and the minister had not come back, when the door out of their own room opened and Sarah came in. She came in slowly, almost timidly, and her eyes, which looked half-blind with weeping, seemed scarcely to venture to raise themselves to his face, as she came and stood before him.

"Will you forgive me, Sam?" she said. Her voice was not so much tremulous as exhausted. "I am very, very sorry."

Sam threw aside his paper gladly enough.

"Forgive you!" he began, cheerfully, "why, there's nothing to forgive!"

The light fell full upon her face—white and heavy-eyed, and distressful with sorrow of a kind he had never seen in it before: the expression of a bitter repentance. He was almost startled.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "you've never been crying your eyes out all this time over a little tiff like that? Well! it wasn't even that much. It takes two, you know, to make—"

He broke off, with a sudden perception that he had not exactly hit upon the most consolatory line of argument.

"I know, Sam," she said, in that weary, humbled voice. "It was all my fault; you have nothing to be sorry for. Oh! you have never been anything but good and kind and patient from the first day till now. I don't deserve it." And then, as though the burden of her remorse was too heavy to stand up under, she knelt down beside him, and hid her face upon his knees. "It was wicked of me, Sam," she sobbed, "but—"

He sprang to his feet, and lifted her up almost roughly, pushing her back into his chair.

"Sarah, for my sake don't do that!" he exclaimed. "What are you about? what are you thinking of?"

He was so really shocked that, for the moment at least, his voice and manner took a sort of manliness that was new to them. It was transient enough, but it had been, and it contained a pledge of not unhopeful possibilities.

Just now nothing further came of it. When he spoke next, pulling her hands down from before her face, his style, like his action, was that of the rather awkward, extremely youthful young man whom alone she knew; of whom alone, indeed, he was as yet conscious himself.

"Look here, old lady," he said, "you sha'n't bully yourself this way—do you hear? I wouldn't let any one do it to you, and I'm blessed if I let you do it to yourself."

"I had no right. It was very wrong of me to speak to you so."

"Bless you," he said, cheerfully, "it didn't hurt me. I like it. Honor bright! I expect you were quite right, only I don't seem to have quite caught hold of what you meant, exactly—just what you want me to do. But, anyway, don't you be afraid to speak out, missus. I'd always a deal sooner folks said things out than I would keep on fancying they're thinking 'em."

She shrank a little for a moment, and her eyes dropped lower. He had proposed a dilemma to which she saw no answer. By-and-by he was to begin to feel the force of it himself; at present the idea contained no hint for him of future unpleasantness. Sam was shrewd at times, but he had little synthetic ability; he seldom saw the deductions to be drawn from his own observations.

He lifted his wife's drooping head and kissed her, and dried her poor smarting eyes with his own handkerchief with a tenderness disguised as burlesque. And she was content for now to hold his hand, and let her aching head rest upon his shoulder, and feel the peace of present forgiveness. What though his last words contained promise of perplexities of conscience innumerable for the future? She was worn out to-night with moral struggle; for this one hour at least she was fain to rest.

For that night, then, so far so good. But matters could scarcely stand quite as before: If Samuel Arkwright was not much used to serious methodical thinking, he was by no means incapable of reflection, and in a fragmentary, inconsecutive sort of way he thought more about that scene in the lane than was altogether for his happiness. That Sarah had no warmer feeling for him than friendliness and gratitude he had known, and had begun to be a little troubled in knowing it. That even this much was the result of principle and forbearance he had not once suspected, and it could scarcely be a pleasant reflection for any husband. He was not, then, up to his wife's standard, and he saw little hope that he ever should be—so vague, as he himself had said, were his ideas of what she really did expect of him.

For his age, Sam was, in many ways, curiously undeveloped. If he had been left to himself he would probably not have thought of marriage for the next three or four years, and it would have been quite soon enough. Perhaps no great harm had been done by thus antedating the time that nature intended; only it was a little hard on him to have to work out his development under such comparatively complex conditions—a little hard, too, on the woman who, his senior at present in all but actual years, was tied to him during the process. Leisurely in mental growth by nature, there had been very little hitherto to bring him out. Rather had both his circumstances and his temperament contributed to keep him back, as it were. He had never known trouble; he had never known any real severity of temptation. Severe effort of any kind he had never been called upon to make; his responsibilities were

not heavy in themselves, and he discharged them without any morbid reflections on their weight. His life indeed had been very easy, and he took it easily; the standard around him had never been painfully high; it was limited to the ordinary requirements of morality and respectability, and to Sam to be moral and respectable was no difficulty at all. He liked life to be amusing, certainly, but he was very easily amused; his tastes were healthy and simple, and he was, by nature, singularly unselfish—a quality, it is true, so precious as to give ground for the highest possible hopes of any character in which it is found. For the rest, the unspoilable spoilt child of the settlement from his boyhood, he had never had an aspiration or an ambition in his life, and nobody had ever seen any particular reason why he should.

To come upon such a nature as this, with a sudden demand that he should take life seriously; should raise his standard to some unimaginable height; should leave his sunny cruising among the shallows and launch out into some unknown, unsounded deep—was simply to produce first bewilderment, then a sort of discouragement and timidity, and therewith a certain slight sense of injury.

From that day forward his wife came before Sam more or less in the light of a critic, and he was not used to act before critics—only before an accommodating and appreciative audience. It made him nervous, and he resented it a little, too. It seemed somewhat ungrateful of her; that she was his superior in many ways *he* was most freely willing to admit; but should *she* not have been a little blind to the deficiencies of the man that loved her?

But she did not love him; never had done so: she had not even (he told himself) that amount of gentle liking for him which at least he had thought her to possess. Well, then, why— Sometimes when he was away from her, at work in the shops or spending some evening *en garçon* again among his bachelor associates, he would almost resolve, with a sort of impatience, to live henceforward on that footing of mere friendliness and protective kindness which he had marked out for himself as at once the least and the most that duty required of him in the days when matrimony had seemed to him a condition to be, at best, endured. He would almost resolve this; and then he would go home and note the traces of her presence everywhere, in order and purity and peace; and, coming into the room where she was, see her moving about or sitting at work, always with that quiet devotional purposefulness, so to speak, which he had learned to feel and to appreciate, though not to in-

terpret or understand; and watch the plain pale face, which he never remembered now was plain, light up to welcome him with the smile which she was never too busy or too much absorbed to remember. Then he would know that indeed he loved her, and could not help loving her; it was no more in his power now to whistle this love down the wind than it had been in his will, or even in his wish, to give it birth.

Still, from the time he made that unfortunate discovery regarding her sentiments there came to be a difference. The change was very subtle, very slight; love, indeed, would have detected it, but Sarah's gentle, unexacting dutifulness let it pass unfelt, if not absolutely unobserved. He was not less kind, not less cordial in his manner; but he scarcely made so much demand upon her either for time or sympathy as he had grown to do. Also, a certain *rap-prochement* began to take place between him and the old minister. In little ways innumerable now the old man was conscious of a triumph, precious almost as a woman's, over a detested, a once successful rival, and if he could have made her feel it no doubt he would have done so.

But he could not. Sarah was honestly unaware of the nature of her husband's feeling for her. Her feeling for him was not of the kind which is likely to be swift to jealousy.

So with imperceptible widening of the rift the quiet months slid on; and then something happened which once more disturbed her terribly.

She had gone with Sam to spend the evening at a farm in the valley, about a mile beyond the settlement—a farm where occasional boarders used to be taken; generally teachers from Wellington or Stellenbach for the holidays, or now and then a couple on their honeymoon. It was one of these last they had gone to see—a friend of Sam's from Cape Town and his bride. The Reeves were there, too, Mrs. Reeves being an acquaintance of the bride; a niece of the farmer, on a visit to her uncle and aunt, who proved to have some suburban friends in common with the boarders, had been also invited to the festivities.

These began with tea, an ample and luxurious meal to which the party sat down soon after assembling. After that, and a little not very flourishing conversation, Miss Graaf, the niece, under much pressure, favored the company with "No, Sir!" accompanying herself as best she might on the seraphina, which seemed to resent this prostitution of its harmonies to secular uses; it was a serious-mind-

ed instrument, accustomed only to hymns. Then there was a pause. It was generally understood that some entertainment other than conversation must be provided on these occasions, but the young couple evidently had nothing to suggest. They all sat about the round centre-table, with its inevitable vase of everlasting in the middle; and Cassell's Illustrated Bible; a thrilling revelation of convent life in a paper cover; two or three Sunday-school prize books, and a copy of *Thomson's Season's* by way of literature, grouped around it.

Then Mrs. Reeves said:

"If anybody had a pack, we're just a nice-sized party for a game of cards."

It was really a rather audacious suggestion for a member of the Primitive Gossellers to make in this country community. But of course only those of the party who belonged to that community could realize this. The bridegroom cheered up considerably at this suggestion, and Miss Graaf answered with alacrity:

"Uncle has some, I know. There was a commercial gentleman staying here last spring, and he left them. I don't know but what there may be two packs."

The bridegroom went off to secure the treasure; the party left behind began to clear the table. Only Mrs. Arkwright, who was always used to be the first to give a helping hand in any work, stood where she had risen, motionless, as it seemed, with distress; her eyes sought her husband with a desperate appeal. Sam was clearing vigorously and did not at first observe her. To tell the truth, he had not been particularly startled personally. It would not be the first time in his life that he had played cards. Not, certainly, in Beulah itself, but on holiday visits to Cape Town, and during the years of his apprenticeship at the Paarl he had done so on occasion. If this was known in Beulah it had been winked at; no remonstrance had ever been addressed to him on the subject; but when, turning round, he saw his wife's piteous, almost terrified face, he understood it well enough to feel exceedingly uncomfortable.

He answered the mute summons of her eyes, and came up to where she stood a little apart. She caught at his hand with a strange nervousness, as though to keep him by her.

"Oh, Sam," she whispered, "sha'n't we go home?"

The young man hesitated; the move, so simple to her, naturally enough seemed much more complicated to him. Before he could formulate any definite reply his friend came back with the cards, and all the rest of the party took their seats round the table.

"How many are we?" said Mrs. Reeves, who felt that the brilliance of her suggestion had given her a right to pose as mistress of the ceremonies. "One, two, three—seven. Shall we try 'Commerce?' we all know that, I suppose. Come, Mr. Arkwright, will you take the first deal?"

Sam was still standing beside Sarah; the tremulous touch of the fingers which were lingering on his had a strange power to detain him. His own honest conscience did not really in the least echo the cry of this other conscience outside him, yet he could not close his ears to that one's appeal. On the other hand, he had never in his life done anything that could have seemed ill-natured or unsociable. He hesitated; he looked at her almost pathetically for a dispensation; she felt the wavering of his heart, and the sickness of sudden hopelessness came over her own. She let her hand fall away from his, and her soul pleaded with his no more. What was the use? it was always the same. Sam interpreted the movement as a permission, hailing it with a rather shamefaced relief, and slipped quietly into a chair between Miss Van Eyssen and the bride. Sarah drew back to a distant seat in the shadow.

"Isn't Mrs. Arkwright going to join us?" asked Mrs. Reeves of Sam, not too politely.

"No; she doesn't know anything about it," said Sam, hastily. "She don't much care about these sort of things."

"Oh, if Mrs. Arkwright will do me the honor to sit by me, and permit me to give her a little assistance at first, I feel sure that in a round or two a lady of her capabilities will play as well as any one," ventured Mr. Reeves, who did not understand the situation at all.

"Can't you see, Mr. Reeves, that it's against the lady's conscience?" said Mrs. Reeves, sharply, before Sarah could reply for herself. "I'm sure we'd none of us like to interfere with that."

The other women smiled discreetly; the host looked uncomfortable; Sam silently anathematized the accident of sex which made him powerless for vengeance. But Mr. Reeves gazed at Sarah with a countenance beaming with respectful admiration.

"Ah! Mrs. Arkwright," he exclaimed, "if we all had your elevation and strength of principle, what a different world this might be!"

And then he let his eye fall with a quite undiminished innocent content on the little heap of cards which was accumulating before him, as Sam dealt them out with rather vicious energy. Mr. Reeves was decidedly lucky at games, and he liked them very much.

Mrs. Reeves more nearly tossed her head than was consistent with her code of manners; Sarah turned hers aside, a little more heartsick than before. How much more comfortable to her soul would have been one of Jesse Runciman's rather haughty rebukes, exaggerated if not unjust though they so often were! She sat apart, and tried neither to look nor think—tried to forget what they were doing. But the party soon became much too lively to admit of any abstraction. Almost against her will she was forced to look and listen; and of all the bitter hours she had been through since she came out, none had been so bitter as this.

The laughter, the growing boisterousness of the players, the tap of the counters on the wood as they changed hands, the too triumphant, or sometimes too irritable tones, were terrible to her. Games do constitute a distinct trial of temper to some persons, and Mrs. Reeves was one of them. She was as decidedly unlucky as the school-master was fortunate; she did not lose with a good grace to any one, and to her husband she could put no grace into her involuntary contributions at all. He, in the elation of a rare sense of superiority, became quite cheery and audacious.

"Six over here, if you please, Tilly, my dear," he would actually venture on this in his present mood with a rather aggravating chuckle. And she would bite her red lips, and, muttering something doubtful about the correctness of his calculations, would push over her counters with a spiteful scrape, or toss them down with a bang, her color heightened, her hard, bright eyes sparkling angrily.

As for the younger people, they were fairly romping. Sam in particular—secretly uncomfortable, and conscious, as she would never have believed, of his wife's patient, unremonstrating, disapproving presence—grew as usual noisier and more pronounced from nervousness, and really was very conspicuous, indeed. He kept shouting out that his friend was cheating, and then, in a storm of laughter and exclamations, the two would make dashes at each other's counters across the table till it shook again, and threaten each other with their fists; and then the bride, shrieking with laughter also, would fling her arms round her husband to keep him back, and Miss Van Eyssen, with becoming maidenly discretion, would giggle, and even venture a gentle slap on Arkwright's arm, whereupon he began to nurse the injured member with howls—and so on. There was no harm in any of it, but it was not exactly the sort of behavior to modify disapproval or overcome the prejudices of an already unsympathetic observer.

And to Sarah it meant so much. To her, loud voices, violent gestures—all too unrestrained demonstrations of animal spirits, except in the merest children—were almost physically painful; she shrank from them instinctively. But this was something worse; for to her all this was simply gambling. That the actual medium of gain and loss chanced to be valueless made no difference in her judgment of the principle; it was merely an accident. The excitement, the irritability, the unguardedness of tone and manner—all this was just what she would have expected. It adequately fulfilled the ideas she had acquired of the reckless gambler from the only sources whence she could have gained any acquaintance with him.

It was over at last; and by this time Sarah looked so white and weary that Sam, declining to wait for the proffered refreshment which she had refused, took her away at once. The night was utterly black; the threatened rain was coming down as it can do in South Africa, where nature at least seldom does anything by halves, whatever may be said of man. By the light of a lantern and under shelter of the same umbrella they made their way, little cheerfully, across the sodden veld, where what had been a track was now little more than a shallow stream. To outward seeming, indeed, Sam was lively enough; in spite of rain and darkness and stumbling, he kept up an agreeable rattle of jokes, comments, and ejaculations; and if he got no reply he could scarcely complain, for he really left no opening for remark of any kind. But he could not keep up this sort of thing indefinitely. By-and-by, as they turned into the road, he lapsed from chattering into whistling, then into a moment of silence; then all at once he raised the lantern, and for an instant scanned his wife's face by its light; in the strong, yet unsteady glare she looked more pale, more weary than before.

"You've been worrying, old lady, haven't you?" he said, with an attempt at ease.

She made no answer, unless a sigh repressed with pain could be so called, and they walked on in silence till they were nearly at their own gate. Then he spoke again with a sort of outburst.

"Come, missus, I know you must be thinking me a precious bad lot. Just say it out; give it me all you know. It clears the air."

This time the sigh was almost a sob, and she did not repress it; speak she could not. Doubt, despondency, dread—all conspired to bind her tongue.

"A chap that plays cards," he insisted; "a chap that can't say 'No'—"

"Oh! Sam, don't!" she broke out in despair. "Don't make me judge! It's not my place. I can't; I won't."

They stood by the gate, now. For the second time he made that fiery scrutiny of her face; and now he laughed, a little ruefully.

"You've done the judging already, old lady," he said.

And in truth, with bitter reluctance, so she had.

CHAPTER XVII

"Oh, Jesse, do either stay in or keep out. How can I do anything when you are fidgeting about like this?"

Mattie was in the parlor, surrounded by piles of bright-colored materials, from which she was cutting off samples of different short lengths, glancing now and then at the clock, which drew towards four. Her husband had just come into the room for the fifth or sixth time. He was standing by the table, watching her, and Mattie had really not unfairly described him as fidgeting. He was ruffling about the stuffs; twisting bits of string around his slight, nervous-looking fingers; opening and shutting her scissors whenever she laid them down for a moment. His eyes were restless, too; now they would be following her every movement; then he would turn them aside hastily, almost as if he feared a rebuke.

"I do wish you had your teaching back again!" said Mattie, desperately, after a pause in which he had contrived to upset a box of pins and tear up a small paper of measurements. "Is there really nothing you can find to do?"

"What are *you* going to do?" he said, evading a question which he could not answer very satisfactorily.

"I've told you ever so many times that Mr. Blake is coming at four to settle something about the bazaar. He has a new idea about the decorations, and I'm cutting off these patterns for him to try the colors—and, *please*, don't mess the things about so!" she said. Her tone was less petulant than her words; she really did try to put some restraint upon it; but it was scarcely wonderful that she felt fretted.

Jesse pushed all the things angrily away from him, up into a heap.

"Who *is* that fellow?" he exclaimed. "I'm sure *he* seems to have nothing to do! He—" He checked himself, and went on, rather sullenly, but more quietly: "Mr. Blake is always coming here."

"We have been in Kimberley ten weeks, and he has been here just twice," said Mattie, accurately, but not too ingenuously. "And, as you were out both times, I don't see that he's been in *your* way, anyhow. These things about private stalls can't be settled at the general meetings; that's not what they're meant for. And it isn't as if I was doing it for myself; I'd know what I'd like for myself, and no more fuss about it; but you're bound to think more if you're managing a thing for somebody else. Mr. Blake says Miss de Jongh is awfully particular about these things."

The amiable but not artistic Sophy had exactly two ideas on the subject of decoration. One was leno curtains over pink glazed calico; the other was leno curtains over Turkey twill. With either of these she was eternally content; and if Gerald did not know this, it was not for want of hearing her repeat the suggestion.

"I hate all this nonsense!" said Runciman, irritably, beginning to pace about the room. "Miss de Jongh knows plenty of people she could have asked to help, just as well as you. You're always working over it, one way or another, and I'm sure you ought not to be. It's too much for you; you know you ought to take care."

"I shall take plenty of care as soon as there's any real need; you needn't worry yourself about that. I know this won't do me any harm—good, rather."

She said the last words after a pause, with a sort of nervous earnestness, quite different from anything there had been in her tone before, which might have startled him if his own heart had gone more with his remonstrance.

But, in truth, he was neither so anxious nor so careful of Mattie as might, perhaps, have been expected. It is doubtful whether the prospect of fatherhood had really added much, or, indeed, anything to his satisfaction. He had everything that he wanted, already. If the new-comer should in any way interfere with his enjoyment he was prepared to be jealous even of his own child. Meanwhile, he thought of the future as little as possible. He would have been shocked if he had known how completely he was becoming demoralized; but he knew very little about himself in these days. His whole life seemed tottering on the verge of change, and his moral nature grew giddy and confused with fleeting glimpses of some indefinable abyss.

Now, he did not press an argument which did not either naturally or frequently occur to him. He came back to the table and stood beside her, and presently he put his arm round her and drew closer to her. There was something painful in the movement: it was too timid, too deprecatory—something suggestive of the fawning of an unloved dog, whom yet persistent discouragement, though it can intimidate, cannot altogether repress. It was new in Runciman, and, though he did not know this, might have been traced back to a quite definite date. "I wonder if you would mind very, very much giving up the bazaar?" he said. "If you knew how glad I should be, how different I should feel altogether, I think you would. Won't you?"

She twisted herself away from him with real anger.

"How can you talk such nonsense!" she exclaimed. "What will you want me to do next, I should like to know? I couldn't get out of it now if I wanted to, and I wouldn't if I could. So that's all about it."

His face darkened.

"You'd have to if I said you must."

Mattie opened her eyes a little, for this tone, too, was new; but it did not seem to intimidate her much.

"Well, say it, then!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "I declare, I'd much rather you said it and have done with it than keep on fidgeting and worrying and changing your mind every day or two, like you have been doing for the last I don't know how long!"

But to the infinite misfortune of both of them, he did not say it. His mood changed, as it changed now continually; he sighed and turned away. Her manner changed with his.

"Don't mind me, Jesse," she said, almost penitently. "I can't help being cross sometimes now, you know. I don't mean things." She paused; then, as he took no notice, she seemed to make an effort. It almost looked as if she had to summon up courage to make the move, but she made it. She went up to him, and then she who used never to volunteer a caress put one hand on his shoulder, and with the other gently turned his moody face towards her own, as one might do to a sulky child. Her manner of late had been as new as his. She never now incited him in the way she had done after her return from the Strand, yet neither had she gone back to the almost patiently reluctant submission of the first weeks of her marriage. Now, from time to time, she would force herself, as it were, to a sort of nervous effort of demonstrativeness. It might

have seemed that she was growing afraid of her own fear; that some new and secret dread was giving her a horror of that strange constitutional shrinking, even while fear and shrinking were more constantly present to her mind than ever before.

"See," she said, "it's quite true what I was saying; I can't really give up now, it would put everybody out so. But it's only a month, you know; that's not long, is it? and then there'll be an end of everything."

He softened on the instant; he had her in his arms, held her to his breast, and said, hungrily, as it were: "And then we'll be all comfortable by ourselves again, like we used to be, sha'n't we? as happy as we used to be at Beulah. You were happy there, weren't you?" But he did not venture to wait for an answer. "We'll just go back to the old times, and everything will be as it was before—just you and me—won't it?"

"Yes," said Mattie; and, indeed, she expected nothing else. If she sighed, the sound was stifled in his embrace.

He kissed the crisp, wandering vine-tendrils of her hair; the whiteness of her brow; the drooping lids which half veiled eyes in which there was little of the usual sparkle at this moment; kissed her on the cheeks and lips, not once but many times. At last he released her. "Now, I am going out," he said. But he did not seem to be in any particular haste.

"Oh! I didn't mean that," said Mattie, with some compunction; "it was only the fidgeting in and out I minded. Don't go away for me; you—you can help somehow, I dare say," she ended rather vaguely. There was not, perhaps, much enthusiasm in her tone, but neither was there any insincerity; he would have been quick enough to detect it. But now he was not to be outdone in magnanimity.

"No; I have been working at that translation all the morning. I want a walk."

He had, at any rate, been sitting over it, and he honestly believed he had been working. But work now was a different thing from what it had been in the days when every given hour had its given task, which could not be omitted or dreamed over without open failure and blame.

"Well, where shall you go?"

"I think I'll go over to the Malay Camp; Andrics moved up there as much as three weeks ago, and I promised to go and see him," said Jesse; and then he really did leave.

Mattie heard the door shut, and she went to the window and watched him down the red, dusty, straggling street till he was out of sight; and then she stood a moment still, and for an instant her face grew strangely serious, almost wistful. The next minute she had turned away, and began flitting about the room, tidying up and humming a waltz tune as she moved; and her eyes were bright, and her lips broke into a saucy smile.

Runciman went on his way rather elate; for some reason he fancied that he had obtained a decided victory over himself, though he would have been puzzled to define it. He walked on till, in two or three minutes, he came out upon the main road. And there, just at the opposite side of the street, he saw Westoby talking with a young man. Jesse had never seen Gerald Blake, but it would have been strange indeed if he had not had an instinct for him. Besides, Gerald had too much of the air of a visitant from other and very different spheres to escape notice, even from the uninterested. He had not, indeed, the bad taste to dress London in the colonies; but he really could not help wearing his colonial outfit with a difference. He did not amalgamate with his surroundings.

A 'bus going to Kimberley was in sight; Runciman went to meet it and got in, really to escape the temptation, which suddenly rushed upon him, to watch, to follow, the movements of this stranger, who yet, to his instincts, was no stranger. A few moments later the 'bus drew up for another passenger. Westoby got in. His companion was already out of sight. Runciman followed his steps in his heart.

It was not often that Westoby condescended to the use of a vehicle of any kind; but perhaps to-day he was pressed for time; at any rate, he got in and sat down in the corner next the door beside Jesse. For the last three weeks it had seemed to Runciman as though Westoby pervaded the whole of Kimberley and Beaconsfield. Yet, in point of fact, he had not even seen him very frequently, far less had any intercourse with him. It was by no means Westoby's policy to appear intimate with the young minister; more often than not, when they met, they exchanged no words at all; when they did, the remarks were of the most commonplace description. Never once, by word or manner, had Westoby alluded to the evening in the old kraal; on the other hand, never once had he suffered Jesse to pass him without exacting some kind of recognition, were it only that of a glance. How he managed to enforce this the younger man could never have said; it remained that, in spite of desire and even resolu-

tions to the contrary, he could no more now refuse the homage of the eye, when the Baas chose to demand it, than he had been able on that dreadful day to refuse the homage of his hand.

Now Westoby took no notice of him, except by an indifferent nod; he sat back in the corner, took a newspaper out of his pocket, and apparently became absorbed in it at once. And now Jesse was anxious to speak—would have been glad of an opening. Westoby was not going to give him one; he knew the young man would not be able to hold out long, and he deliberately counted on the amount of demoralization he would suffer from yet another surrender. He was amply justified in his expectations. By the time the 'bus was half-way across the short mile of veld which lies between Kimberley and Beaconsfield, Jesse had given in. Westoby saw the moment, and gave him just so much chance of beginning as was made by laying down the paper to fold it backward.

"Who—who was that you were talking to just now?" began Jesse, with a transparent attempt at indifference. He had not meant to be so abrupt, but his anxiety had no time to waste on preliminaries. "He scarcely looked as if he belonged to Beaconsfield," he added.

Westoby grinned.

"Well, he don't," he said. "Who is he? Mr. Blake."

Jesse had thought he knew it already, yet when his instinct was thus confirmed he felt it as a quite new shock.

"What is he?" he asked.

"He? Oh, he's a gentleman," laughed Westoby. "I never could find out that he was anything else much; but you may take his word for it he's that."

The sneer was obviously directed at Gerald; but it was so contrived as to make Jesse yet more uncomfortable. He moved restlessly; he looked back through the open door along the dusty road; but for very shame he would have got down.

"Ay," said Westoby, meditatively, after a pause; "it's a queer thing how folks run up against each other from all over the place, as you might say, once they've met. Who'd have thought of us three coming together again here—him, and me, and your missus?"

Like some mortal wound which comes too suddenly—too sharply and unexpectedly to be at once realized by the victim for the thing it is—the words struck upon Jesse's understanding some seconds before the anguish penetrated his heart. He sat and stared a little

at Westoby, and felt that something had happened, and did not yet quite comprehend what it was.

"We all came out together in the *Tartar*, you know, last year. You've never made the trip, have you? It's not much fun for an old stager like me; but I reckon young folks like it—plenty of dancing and high-jinks generally, and moonlight, and all that sort of thing, you know, and nobody much to spoil sport. Ay! the young 'uns had good times on board the *Tartar*, you bet." He understood, then. Yet so strong are the traditions of conventionality, the traditions of a lifetime, even on such a nature as his, that they worked now, even without his will, to keep him from speech, which must have been a cry, to enforce a decent amount of outward composure. It was but for a second or two; almost as Westoby finished speaking the 'bns stopped to set down a passenger. Jesse got down mechanically—mechanically, rather than from any present exercise of volition, he began to walk in the direction on which he had previously resolved.

Westoby looked after him with a contempt which could almost afford a dash of pity—so little likely was pity to alter any plan of his.

"That's right!" he said to himself. "Just make her a scene or two, till you've frightened her into fairly hating you. Then, when you've got things to a dead-lock, perhaps I shall have something else to say to you; you'll listen then, but you must be given your head first, I know. Go your own way, then, till you've had enough of it; I'm in no hurry. Besides, it won't be long first, anyhow."

Almost unconsciously Runciman walked on. Whatever he might have done, by whatever outbreak of speech or movement he might have relieved or further exasperated himself, if he had been away from public observation, no such outbreak was possible for him here. Here were houses, people; outwardly, he must still restrain himself; inwardly, he was putting no restraint upon himself at all. He did not think much; it could not be called thought. At first he did little but repeat to himself, over and over again: "She never told me she had known him before! If she had only told me!" Then—once: "*Why* should she not have told me?" And so, with a rush of despairing passion, he surrendered himself to every suggestion that the experiences of his own temperament could evoke of all that might be implied in Westoby's last words. And then came chaos; in his ears a sound like the storm-wind, before his eyes a mist like blood—and always, through it all, the shadow of Gerald

Blake across his threshold; the serene assurance of the face of Gerald Blake turned outward upon him with a smile.

He was up in the Malay Camp by now, lost, entangled in the spacious labyrinth of bare red plain, over which the square, flat-roofed, red-brown houses of unbaked brick were pitched about anywhere, now in clusters, now far apart, like the tents of a disorderly host. Here and there the dull, rippling gray of a tin tenement broke the vast monotony of red. A barefaced sun was drawing near its setting in a heaven without a cloud; the whole wide desolation lay steeped, yet scarcely softened, in the lengthening shadows which lay along the dust. Not a tree, not a blade of grass, only here and there the gray-green prickly foliage and yellowish-white blossom of the Mexican thistle—fit flower for the desert—made a sort of mirage mockery of verdure. The ground was strewn with broken bottles, old iron, refuse of all kinds; in one place an old playing-card, cast out among other rubbish, added its own suggestion to the character of the locality, already little ambiguous. Children of every shade of color—Indians, Malays, natives, half-castes, whites of the poorest, most outcast type—played and screamed, dogs of undiscoverable breeds prowled and barked about the broad, irregular streets.

Jesse neither heard nor saw. Presently in his blind wandering he stumbled over an old tin which lay across his aimless path—stumbled so heavily that he nearly fell. The slight physical shock, the instinctive effort to save himself, brought the young man to consciousness; he stood a moment looking round with something of the bewilderment of one suddenly awakened. Some colored women were standing on the stoep of a slightly better-class looking house than most. He thought they were looking at him curiously, and with the sense that comes at times, after some silent crisis of mental anguish, that the forgotten outer man must have been betraying all unawares something of the tumult that has raged within, he went up to them and, with a vague idea of accounting for himself, asked his way. The brief moments of discussion between them on the subject gave him yet a little more time to recover himself; when he had his answer he lingered still, in a sort of pause of emotion, fearful of quitting this little rock of common, every-day life, lest the next step should plunge him again into the blinding, suffocating surge of which the roar was still in his ears; into those bitter waters which, even as he paused, washed up again and again over his soul, threatening every moment to bear him away.

At the door of the next house a Malay in his shirt-sleeves, with his red turban-handkerchief bound about his head—a being civilized and respectable (to outward appearance) compared with the natives and half-castes both in feature and costume—stood leaning up against the wall, his arms folded, and that insufferable expression of cynical superiority in his evil eyes and unpleasant smile which seems to characterize the true believer. His eyes were turned idly towards a red mud cottage, standing about a stone's-throw off upon the desert; round its closed door and its one small window clustered a little swarm of children, chattering and gesticulating. The young minister looked vaguely at the man, at the children.

"What are they doing?" he asked, to make yet a little silence from thought.

"Ach! they are bad childrens," said one woman, with virtuous indignation.

"Here, 'Hanna, *kom gij saa!*'" she screamed to one of her offspring, in a sudden zeal for propriety. Of course, she was not obeyed; she turned again to Runciman. "A man make his wife dead in that house last night; the police come at eleven to-day and take away the body and lock up the house, and the man is in the *tronk* already; they find him in the canteen. But the childrens will look. *Kom gij saa!*" she screamed again. "He come last night and find a man by her in the house, and the man he get away, but the husband he take the chopper for the wood—" and so on, through an abundance of sickening detail, ending, as a matter of course, with the form: "They was all *baai dronk*, Baas," seemingly considered as sufficient explanation, if not even excuse.

When she had finished, Jesse was standing staring at the house; he could scarcely be whiter than he had been before, but now he was trembling a little. He spoke a few words of such mechanical morality as the subject and the expectations of the narrator seemed to require of one in the dress of a minister, and then he turned away; and now it seemed to him that his head was very clear. Yet he was not conscious of following out any train of thought or reasoning. Only that red mist had cleared away, and in its place, crude and hard, like a materialization of his shapeless thought, stood this coarse brutality of fact: Murder. He went on, looking at the spectre, not capable, as yet, of treating with it either as friend or foe, only stilled and trembling. And after a while, as by a dreadful fascination, his steps turned back again, led him just past the fatal house. The children hung still around the door; one young

ruffian of about fourteen, with his face glued to the window, was shouting out:

"Allah! ik zie de bloed; daar, langs de kooie!"

The Malay still stood by his door, smiling and sneering; as Jesse passed he turned the wicked penetration of his eyes upon him, smiling on as though he had read the young man's heart and found there matter that was not alien. Jesse turned his head aside. He went on shuddering, and scarcely knew whether it was his good or his evil angel had led him hither; whether for warning or for incitement.

For the present, at least, the effect was sobering. By degrees, as he walked back, and the quick dusk gathered, and the mere physical chill of the May evening cooled his blood, reason began to assert itself.

When he got home Mattie was alone—had been alone a long time. She was just finishing the preparations for tea. They sat down together; he made an attempt to eat, but in a moment or two pushed away his plate, the contents almost untouched. Mattie, looking at him with some surprise, saw him white and seemingly exhausted, his eyes heavy, and, as it were, extinct; now and then the muscles of his face worked nervously. He had not spoken a word since he came in.

"What's the matter, Jesse?" she asked. "Has anything happened? Are you ill?"

"I have a headache," he said, truly enough. He put his elbow on the table, and dropped his head on his hand, shading his eyes from the glare of the lamplight. He paused, then went on with a slight shudder: "There has been a horrible murder in the Camp."

"Well, don't tell me about it," said Mattie, quickly; "I'm sure I only wonder there aren't a lot more—dreadful place! But it's no use your making yourself ill over it. You remember it is your night for going to the location; you always come back dead-beat after that, anyhow. You had better eat something."

"I can't," he said, with a gesture of disgust. "Well, give me another cup of tea, then."

He drank it feverishly and asked for more; then sat silent, as before. Mattie, from real motives of consideration, refrained from further speech also; she continued her meal with a good appetite.

He sat quiet enough now, and miserable enough, too, not knowing how to speak, yet feeling the impossibility of silence. He must

speech, must tell her that he knew; yet how should he frame his speech? Should he question, upbraid, accuse? He tormented his throbbing brain in vain; it would not act under his control, only go back with sick persistence to that horror in the Camp. From time to time he looked at his wife from under the shadow of his hand—so trim, so dainty, so alive—and then he would shudder and close his eyes to shut out another picture, a horrible transformation scene, in which he saw her—how differently! He felt frightened, humbled; yet even the shock had not been able to still the miserable restlessness which drove his soul hither and thither, in defiance at once of reason and of conscience.

Presently the meal was over; it was time to go, and yet he had not spoken.

"Shall you go," asked Mattie, "if your head is so bad?"

"Yes," he said, "I would rather." Then as though he feared to lose again the power of speech before the thing was said, he went on, with a sort of hurrying abruptness, "Mattie, you—you never told me that you had known Mr. Blake before."

There was a moment's silence. Mattie's back was turned towards him, and he could not see how she was suddenly scarlet from neck to brow. Perhaps he did not need to see it; the silence was enough. but he was on his guard now, and though it could torture it could not madden him, as it would have done an hour before.

"It is true, then?" he exclaimed; his voice had a certain heart-broken ring in it.

Mattie had turned round; the color was still bright in her cheeks; she threw back her head and nerved herself for defiance. "What's true?" she said. "That I knew him? Of course it is. He came out in the same steamer as we did—me and Sarah. Would you like to know about anybody else? I've got the passenger-list somewhere about still, I think. Shall I bring it to you and go through all the names? I could have done it long ago if I'd known you cared."

For a moment they stood looking at each other; but he made no step towards her, either for reconciliation or wrath. Just then passion seemed dead within him—dead of exhaustion; there was nothing but sickness of heart, and shame, and fear—of himself, of everything.

Suddenly he turned away; his hands made a gesture of despair. "Oh, Mattie—" he began; and then no more.

He turned again.

"I wish," he said, despairingly, "oh, I wish—" and once more

broke of. For, indeed, he wished so many things, and all so uselessly. He sighed and shuddered again, and then went out wearily into the night.

He came back, as Mattie had foretold, worn out beyond all power of speech, or thought, or even feeling—only thankful to go to bed. He was asleep at once, with the sleep of utter exhaustion; but Mattie lay long awake, wondering, not for the first time, whether she had not been horribly silly not to have told him at first. She had really meant to do so on the day of the first meeting; but she had come back more disturbed than she knew, and while she was seeking an opportunity to introduce the subject naturally, the time had passed during which she could have introduced it at all—and an opportunity of this kind once lost is not readily recovered. Thinking also of many things as she stared out into the darkness—Mattie had been learning to think of late; learning most rebelliously, against her will, escaping from the lesson whenever she could; but learning, nevertheless. She slept at last, to dream that Sarah was kneeling beside the bed weeping—weeping. She woke, and the pillow was indeed wet with tears, but they were her own. She asked herself angrily what she had been crying about? She was quite happy—quite; and she was not doing any harm.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER Runciman had got down from the 'bus, Westoby took up his newspaper again, and read on quietly during the few remaining minutes of the journey. From the terminus he made his way to Main Street, and there entered a neat brick building, apparently devoted to the boards of various public companies, and to chambers for individual notaries, conveyancers, auditors, and so forth. Just as he was going in, Dora Solomon came out. It was plain by the way their eyes met—by the sort of provoking gleam in his, and the sudden flash of annoyance that lighted up the rather sombre depths of hers—that each knew who the other was. But beyond this, and a haughty up-drawing of her head, Dora took no notice of him. Indeed, she was not, of course, supposed to know him socially; she would have been very glad to have felt that her father knew him as little as she did.

As she walked along, her lips were compressed, and two straight fine lines came out upon her brow between the eyes, making them look more gloomy than usual. She was both vexed and anxious, but neither of her vexation nor her anxiety could she have any confident. To her father, indeed, she might and would disburden her mind freely on the matter; but she was not of a patient nature—it was her weakest point—and she was getting weary of unavailing remonstrances. Soon she would shrug her shoulders and hold her tongue, and “let things slide,” merely making such mental preparations for a crash as her active managing brain could scarcely refrain from doing, and perhaps actually finding some solace in the mere prophetic exercise, so to speak, of her real genius for organization.

Now she walked on and recovered her temper, did some shopping, and went in to afternoon tea with Alice Thorne, talked over a past ball, and discussed the question of toilet for a coming one, showing much practical capacity, and as genuine an interest as though she had neither knowledge, experiences, nor capacity different from that of the most ordinary specimens of her age and sex. Without affectation, there was nothing that Dora hated worse than to be thought a remarkable woman; there were moments when she almost hated to know it of herself. It seemed sometimes as though the distinct masculine element in this girl's nature was strong enough to weary the fundamental feminine, while yet it was not always strong enough to sustain it.

Presently she left, and went on to her own home. It was but a few houses farther on: a well-built two-storied brick house in a garden. There was a deep, rather graceful, veranda both above and below, over which the creepers were already beginning to make a fair show in summer-time. Both house and garden looked pleasant and well cared for. Dora saw to that; the servants in that establishment were well trained.

She opened the gate, and walked up the path slowly; she was busy with her thoughts again. On the steps she paused a moment and looked round, considering, at the house itself, at the garden, at the row of pretty detached verandaed houses and well-kept gardens among which it stood, at the bristling gray-green of the great aloe hedge across the road. Dora had little sentiment in her composition, but so far as she had affection for inanimate objects, she might be said to be fond and proud of her home. And she was saying to herself:

"You are very foolish, father; this is better than the Breakwater—and that will be the end, some day, to a certainty."

Yet the calm of her face was unruffled, or ruffled only by the most passing gleam of impatient disapproval. She was hardened to living in the midst of risk, was hardened even to facing an end which she never disguised from herself; and of mere abstract morality, Dora really had no sense at all on this point; all her considerations with regard to it were purely practical.

Judged by the length of the present interview, at least, she had no need to have been jealous of Westoby's intimacy with her father; he did not stay in Mr. Solomon's office above ten minutes; then he went on to Market Square. It is not to be supposed that Westoby was living in Kimberley without visible means of subsistence. He had a business as transport and forwarding agent; a business, in those days, very fairly remunerative, for at that time the railway to Kimberley was barely a year old, extension had not begun to be talked of; moreover, the rush to the new gold-fields was in full swing—conditions all changed now.

His name and the description of his calling might be seen above the door and on the whitened windows of a rather dreary-looking den, sheltering, among auctioneers' premises, wood merchants' and general produce stores, beneath the shabby, dusty, foreign-looking veranda on the south side of Market Square.

He had also a branch establishment at Beaconsfield, which, if it did not do any very extensive business, fulfilled in other ways the purpose of its existence.

In his office he now spent a couple of hours or so—stayed, in fact, till it was time to close, hearing the report of his clerk as to what had been done in his absence, and transacting business generally. In the evening he went out again, this time on horseback.

He rode on for some half-mile beyond the point where he had taken the 'bus in the afternoon, to where, slightly aside from the main road and on the extreme edge of Dutoitspan, a lighted lamp above a doorway indicated a canteen. Less modest indications were afforded by the clamorous voices and the stalwart forms, showing fantastically against the light that streamed through the open door, of a crowd of natives all in as many various stages of intoxication as could escape the practical attention of the police. More than one would pass that line before long, to appear next morning among the list of "drunks" which, together with "thefts" and "no passes," go to form the rather monotonous daily work of the resident magistrate.

Westoby passed the door of the native bar in front of the little crowd, who were staggering or huddling just outside, with no more notice than he would have bestowed on a herd of any objectional but, so far as he was concerned, innocuous animals. Dismounting a yard or two farther on, he threw his horse's bridle over the frame of pegs placed for that purpose, and entered the slightly less disreputable-looking division reserved for white customers. A couple of loafer-looking men were drinking there, but the really lucrative business of this canteen was done among the natives; in the other department the trade was, comparatively speaking, slack.

Behind the counter stood the proprietor, Christian Dreyer, the man whom Westoby had met on board the *Tartar*. He was looking slightly bored, and seemed glad to see the new-comer.

"Well, Baas," he said, "I began to think you were dead and buried. Step along in behind, won't you, and have a chat?"

He called up a barman from some back region to take his place, and himself led the way into a room at the back. It was not a very attractive room, being small and close, by no means clean, and very redolent of tobacco and spirits; but both men were equally indifferent to these details. Dreyer went to a sort of chiffonnier, the top covered with a black oil-cloth thick with dust, on which stood a smart cheap vase, one or two Kaffir curios, and a woman's super-fashionable hat, tawdry with artificial flowers—everything equally smothered in fine red dust. He unlocked the door of the chiffonnier, and took out tumblers and a bottle, presumably of a better quality of liquor than the unutterable abominations which he supplied to his quite contented customers. Then he sat down opposite Westoby at the table, and asked what he had been doing since he saw him last, which appeared not to have been for some much longer time than usual.

Westoby gave him a general sketch of his proceedings, which, if it was not particularly complete, was at least fairly accurate. He was not a man who would ever be hampered by a regard for truth, but neither had he that abstract prejudice in favor of falsehood under all circumstances which distinguished many, perhaps most, of his associates. He felt the impolicy of it. After nine-and-twenty years of South Africa, he still, as a rule, lied only with a motive and when there was a reasonable chance of being believed—which was really a distinction in its way. In the present instance there was nothing to be gained by romance, but the value of reticence was undeniable. Dreyer knew quite well that he was being treated to a very abridged and revised edition of Westoby's recent biography, and felt with re-

gret that, as usual in abridged editions, it was the more picturesque and interesting portions that had been left out. But though a large and all-embracing curiosity was one of the canteen-keeper's most marked characteristics, the Baas was not a subject who lent himself well to cross-examination; consequently, his hearer resigned himself to making the most of such mere bones of information as were alone vouchsafed to him. When it was obvious that there was no more to come, there was a pause. Then, whether with a purpose or whether merely to make conversation, Dreyer said:

"I saw the little missionary's wife, Mrs. Runciman, on the market this morning. She's rather a good hand at a bargain."

"Like enough," said Westoby, indifferently.

They talked in Dutch; for though Dreyer spoke and understood English without actual difficulty, he had never learned to feel at home in it in the way that Westoby was in most languages that he had had occasion to learn at all.

There had been nothing very encouraging in Westoby's tone, but apparently Dreyer felt impelled to hover yet a little around his subject.

"I wonder how she's getting on?" he said, and his wonder was a question—in tone.

"How should I know?" said Westoby, as before. "I don't visit there."

Dreyer laughed.

"I wonder if she knows you're here?"

"Maybe; she's had as many chances of seeing me about as anybody else. I'm big enough."

This might be facetious, but it was not informing; for some reason the Baas seemed singularly impracticable this evening. But the less he seemed inclined to pursue the subject, the less did the other man seem disposed to relinquish it.

"Ah!" he continued, after a moment as it were of contemplation, "she's a downright pretty little baggage; there's no mistake about that. Do you remember that woman as trapped Hancocks at the Welcome Hotel last year?" he added, with some apparent irrelevance.

"I remember that Hancocks always was a fool about a petticoat," said Westoby, contemptuously. "He only got what he deserved."

His eyes seemed to turn for a moment towards the hat lying on the chiffonier, and perhaps Dreyer understood something in his voice, for he said with a laugh, as it were, of excuse:

"I know what you're thinking; but I'm not quite such a fool as to do business with one, anyway. It was deuced clever done, for all that. But I was thinking how neatly the little party we were talking of would do the trick. She'd be the one to come round a chap; I tell you she could bamboozle him proper. Can't you see her at it?"

This time it was Westoby who laughed; perhaps he could.

"Lord! how she used to carry on with that gentleman-loafer chap; you know who I mean," continued Dreyer. "By-the-way, is it true what they're saying—that he's going to marry old 'Jumper' de Jongh's girl? He's 'struck ile' at last, if it is, hasn't he? Do you think it's true?"

"You seem to suppose I'm running all Kimberley," said Westoby, with a touch of impatience. "I know just as much about it as you do—no more nor less. I'm not his boss. All I did was to find him for Rosenthal and Le Sueur, and that lot. Old Rosenthal told me, when I got back this time, that he reckoned he could run the show a bit longer at a profit if he could find a secretary as would take well with the women and wouldn't want to know more than was good for him, so being that the needful came in regular. So there was this chap going a-begging; it seemed just a special providence, Rosenthal said. He's a pious old party, Rosenthal is."

They laughed together.

"Well, I thought, when we were coming out, as you rather reckoned on keeping him for yourself, that was all," said Dreyer.

"Maybe I did then; but I saw soon enough that would be no go. He thinks the only chap in the whole blessed universe that knows anything worth mentioning is Mr. Gerald Blake. He don't know what obedience means, and if it came to a pinch he'd throw his own mother overboard to save his own skin. What's the use of a chap like that?"

"Oh!" said Dreyer, rather stupidly; "but if you weren't going to keep on with him, why did you let him have his money back—and you paid him his share of that big haul we made with it, too, didn't you? Why did you do that?" he asked, with the real interest of a disciple. The paths of the Baas' policy were altogether too mysterious for him.

"Why did I do it?" repeated Westoby. "Because honesty is the best policy. Where did you go to school that they didn't teach you that?"

"Pretty much where you did, Baas, I fancy," said Dreyer, with a grin. "But I don't understand."

"That does happen sometimes, don't it?" said Westoby, sarcastically. "Don't you see, there's many folks as won't bother—that much—about where any money they *make* comes from. But let 'em *lose* it, and they'll ask fast enough, and loud enough, too—and the dickens to pay all round. No. There's questions which, if they ain't going to lead to business, had best not be asked at all; and there's only one way of stopping 'em. It's the cheapest way in the end, you bet."

"Oh!" said Dreyer again. Then, after a pause for meditation, "I see."

"Ay! like the blind man," said Westoby, with a contempt he made no effort to conceal.

But Dreyer showed no signs of resentment; only laughed again. He replenished the contents of the tumblers, and then they sat silent for a while, smoking and drinking. Dreyer seemed to be enjoying his occupation with a disengaged and appreciative mind; but Westoby was thoughtful—his movements were little more than mechanical. Presently he laid aside his pipe for a moment; he bent a little forward, in a manner to enforce attention.

"See," he said, "I've been telling you plenty about my doings." (Dreyer differed from him, but in silence.) "Now I want to hear something about yours. And, first of all, have you been keeping an eye on that missionary chap you were talking about just now?"

It did not surprise Dreyer that his companion should start now, on his own account, a subject to which, when he himself had tried to pave the way for it, he had proved quite unresponsive. For Westoby liked to keep all conversational leads of importance in his own hands; he would not submit to the appearance of being entrapped into a discussion of any kind.

Now he sat a moment looking at Westoby, with his head a little on one side, and something of the expression of a self-satisfied magpie; but his answer, when it came, did not seem much to the point.

"Don't you know," he said, slowly, "I've been converted?"

"No, I didn't," said Westoby, dryly. "I only knew you could afford to be. And I'd like a plain answer to a plain question."

"Well, I have been—and he's done it. He's no end set up about me. I'm a very interesting case, Baas, and I reckon he's keeping his eye on me. Will that do as well?"

Westoby had been about to drink; he set down the tumbler again

suddenly, and for a second there swept across his face an expression very like disgust. The next instant he had taken his momentarily suspended draught with deliberation.

"If anybody ever says to me that you're not a good, useful, all-round man, I'll contradict 'em," he said; then, rather grimly, "You don't mind playing it pretty low down, do you?"

Something in his tone forbade Dreyer to accept this remark as a compliment, for which he might naturally have mistaken it.

"Well, Baas," he said, rather sulkily, "you told me to keep an eye on him, and if you don't fancy that way, I reckon you'll have to invent one yourself. I don't know how else to make it out."

But if Westoby had been weak enough, for a moment, to feel a little disgusted, he was by no means so weak as to allow any abstract opinion of the nature of the proceeding to prevent him from taking the fullest advantage of any amount of unscrupulosity in a subordinate.

"No," he said, "that will do well enough. It's as good as any other plan. Better; you thought it out very well," he added, for he knew when commendation was judicious. Dreyer was really very fond and proud of his own little original plan; he had looked forward, for the last fortnight, to the pleasure of telling it to his appreciative commander, and now he had been disappointed. It would not be wise to leave him in his disappointment. He was easily appeased: he was appeased now. Once assured of this, Westoby relapsed into thought. He pushed back his chair, and began pacing up and down the little room, his head bent, his hand upon his beard, according to his usual habit when considering. Presently he looked up and round at Dreyer, who sat watching him with something between curiosity and respect.

"Ay, ay!" he said, "it ought to work well—very well. I suppose he comes to see you, sometimes—it's natural he should; and sometimes you might go to him? Nobody would be surprised at that; not at either?"

"Nobody."

Westoby nodded two or three times in silence. He took another turn through the room; then he came and stood before the table, opposite Dreyer. He rested both his great hands upon it, and leaned forward across it till he looked the canteen-keeper very near and straight in the face.

"See here," he said, slowly and markedly; "you think you are only doing this job for me because I owe that chap a punishment,

and I'm bound to let him have it; and you're just lending a hand for old acquaintance' sake."

"I'd do more than that for you, Baas," said Dreyer. And he really spoke the truth.

"I know," said Westoby. "You have done more; I don't forget. But there's more in this affair than you think for; more than I thought at first myself, maybe. There's money in it, and not a trifle, either; and I'm not asking any man to do my work for nothing—least of all, so old a chum as you."

"Will it be a big thing, Baas?" asked Dreyer, who had as yet merely grasped an idea of some prospective profit, which he connected but very vaguely with the previous subject of conversation.

"Yes; a very big thing—if I know anything at all. But, mind, it must be *my* work; there must be no fooling around, trying to run this show on your own account. You did me a good turn once, when you risked something by it, too. I've just said I don't forget that; but there's such a thing as overdrawing an account. You understand? This is *my* affair, and I don't hold with other folks bossing my shows."

"I don't know what this one is, yet," said Dreyer, with most unaffected bewilderment.

Westoby stood up straight; he looked at nothing in particular, and his next words came in a matter-of-course tone which he seemed to try not to make impressive.

"Well, I'm going to run that missionary for the business. He's going to be my agent."

If Dreyer's crop of light harsh hair did not stand on end at this announcement, it was the only sign of amazement that was wanting in him.

"He—is going—to buy—for you?" he gasped. "To buy—diamonds?"

"That's so," said Westoby; and if he had held the bond, signed and sealed to this effect, of the man to whom he had not yet even broached the subject, were it ever so cautiously, he could not have spoken with more confidence. He condescended to a little more detail. "See here," he said, and his manner changed suddenly, "I'm watched."

Dreyer looked at him with a sort of sympathetic shock; he whistled—a long, low whistle of respectful condolence. Westoby had flung himself into a chair, his face was darkened as if for one

of his outbursts of passion; the other could hear him swearing under his breath, as it were. But the storm passed off with no more than these mutterings of distant thunder.

"It will blow over after a bit," he said, calmly enough, at the end of a minute; "but of course I shall have to quit business till it does. That's what I went to tell old Solomon this afternoon—that I sha'n't be able to run any of his stuff just yet awhile; if he wants to get any of it across, he'll have to find some one else to do it. I've got to lie by for a bit. But he said he'd sooner hold on to it till he could send it by my boy, as usual."

Dreyer opened his eyes considerably.

"That's the light-heartedest old party ever I came across," he said; "he don't seem to care what risks he runs. Hold on to it! why, he must have a young mine on his premises already. I wonder he don't leave the things about on his dressing-table; he might nearly as well."

Westoby shrugged his shoulders.

"It's no affair of mine," he said. "I only spoke of it by the way. But for me, for us, there's going to be a chance pretty soon that it would be a sin and a shame to lose. I've just found out that Mohetsewa is on his way to get work here. You've heard me talk of that chap? he's about the cutest thing in niggers in the light-fingered line that you'll find between this and the Zambesi. You'll say there are some here now that are no fools at it; but the best of 'em is just a baby compared to him. And I have him under my thumb. He'll get us more stuff in a week than any other nigger on the Fields will do in a month—and safer, at that. But I can't do any business just now myself. Well! here's a chap with a character—a chap as I promised to find work for. Now, do you see at all?"

Apparently Dreyer did; delight and admiration had been broadening and brightening on his face with every word.

"Why, Baas, with a character like that chap's—why! there's nothing, *nothing*, one couldn't venture on at first!" He paused, reviewing the boundless possibilities of such a condition—such a legal condition. "Did *you* ever have a character, Baas?" he asked, with interest.

"Never," said Westoby, promptly. "I made tracks from the workhouse at ten years old without waiting to ask for one. Likely I shouldn't have got it if I had. But you understand now—*everything?*"

Beyond this emphasis he made no allusion to his implied threat of a few moments back. He never repeated a warning.

"Yes; everything," said Dreyer; and the other was quite satisfied. He rose to go.

"But do you really think," said Dreyer, still amazedly, "that you can make your missionary do this—and for nothing?"

"Who said for nothing? Of course not. He will get his commission on every job that's done, and his share of the profits from any cash of his own he may put into the concern."

"Really?" said Dreyer, incredulously.

"Really," repeated Westoby, sarcastically. "For nothing! You don't suppose any chap is going to sell his soul for nothing, do you?" he said, and laughed more harshly than usual.

Dreyer made no answer; even if he had not been mentally and morally incapable of grasping that aspect of the affair—which he was—he was at the moment too much absorbed in another view of the case to have ears or thoughts for anything else.

"Well!" he exclaimed, with the voice of one giving up a problem. "His share—and a commission—and no risks worth thinking of—and you to steer him through what there are, for your own sake! And you call that punishing a fellow! Lord!" he exclaimed, with genuine fervor, "I only wish some one would take and punish *me* that way—that's all!"

Westoby looked at him rather strangely.

"I believe you," he said, and laughed again. "But you ain't *him*. And I tell you," he went on, and there was something in his tone that carried conviction—"I tell you that before I've done with *him*, he'll wish he had never been born."

CHAPTER XIX

"THERE'S a letter for you, Sam," said Sarah Arkwright.

She did not hint to him, even by so much as some trifling urgency of tone, that he should make haste to open it. Yet during the hours between the arrival of the letter and Sam's return to dinner, she had never had occasion to enter the room where it lay upon the table without giving a glance at it, and had never

glanced at it without a rush or such real heart-hunger as, for that quiet nature, amounted almost to passion.

Sam, whose correspondence was neither extensive nor interesting, showed little excitement. It was not till he had done ample justice to his dinner that he took up the letter lying beside his plate.

"From Kimberley," he said. "Runciman, I suppose. What can he want?"

He opened it; a little note dropped out from the larger enclosure, but he did not notice it. Sarah's hands trembled a little for the touch of it, but she did not ask.

The letter was not a long one, but it seemed long enough to contain a certain amount of vexation for Sam. He looked across at Sarah; it seemed, for a moment, as though he grudged his news.

"Well, what has he got to say for himself?" asked Mr. Glasse. He did not take much real interest in the doings or prosperings of the late school-master, but news was not so abundant in Benlah but that he was glad to hear anything, simply as news.

"He hasn't anything to say about himself. They want the missus to go up there," said Sam, rather reluctantly.

Such a light came into Sarah's face as could scarcely have escaped the notice of even an uninterested observer. If the poor girl had quite realized that swift, sudden change in her looks she might have reproached herself even with that as a symptom of a desire too eager to be allowed a disciplined heart. But she did not realize it any more than she observed how her husband's face grew colder as he caught the look in hers. The next moment the light had faded; she looked anxious.

"Mattie!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Sam, is she ill?"

"He doesn't say so. He says she has seemed nervous and upset these last two or three days, and she does nothing but fret for you, and if you could be spared he should be very thankful to you for coming. Oh, he says she was writing, too; there, you can see for yourself." He found the enclosure, and tossed both letters across to his wife. "I guess there's nothing much to worry about, old lady," he said, in a tone between consolation and impatience.

There was really nothing in Runciman's letter beyond what Sam had said. It was composed and expressed even with something of pedagogic stiffness, and was quite uncharacteristic; the most that might have been suspected from it was that the writer had been feeling rather worried. As for Mattie's enclosure, it was reassuring rather than otherwise. It seemed to have been written in excel-

lent spirits; it had certainly been written in great haste—a little scrawled, smudged effusion, with no information, but a great deal of affection and much entreaty to the same effect as Jesse's. From beginning to end there was neither statement nor explanation of any kind.

Sarah had it by heart in a few moments; yet she referred to it again and again in the course of the afternoon, trying to hear Mattie's voice in every word, her heart beating quicker with the hope of hearing it again, not merely in imagination, so much sooner than she had ventured to expect. The matter had not, indeed, been settled at the dinner-table; the time was not long enough to enter upon a discussion to which, moreover, Sam seemed but little inclined. Yet she felt small fear of a refusal; her secret thought, indeed, was that her temporary absence would be a relief to all parties.

In fact, of late domestic relations had been growing more and more strained. The card-playing story had got wind, somehow—of course, not without embellishments—and there had been rather a fuss. Mr. Reeves had been made the scape-goat, for (whatever the ladies of the settlement might have felt about it) none of the men, to whose lot the task must have fallen, were disposed to encounter Mrs. Reeves in an embassy of rebuke. To avoid a scandal among the flock, it was not allowed to come to a case of public censure; but a deputation consisting of the minister (not willingly, but of necessity) and two or three of the principal elders waited upon Mr. Reeves, in a sort of semi-official manner, and reduced him to a state of nervous agitation sufficient to satisfy the demands of justice. Sam, by common consent, was left to the minister, who was no Brutus, and satisfied his conscience with a very mild remonstrance indeed.

The whole affair, so far as that household was concerned, might have blown over quietly enough if the same evening had not chanced to be that appointed for the monthly meeting for prayer and the consideration of affairs by the church officers and heads of departments. The minister presided, of course, and Sam, as head of the wagon-works department, was bound to a most unwilling attendance.

Now Beulah had its faults—the faults of all little communities; but, on the whole, it was a good-natured, kindly, and liberal (the heads of some settlements said too liberal) little place. The minister was popular, Sam even more so; the meeting, as a whole,

then, assembled that evening with a sort of tacit understanding that by-gones should be allowed to be by-gones, and no references made to the unfortunate occurrence which had certainly been amply discussed already. But to be efficacious, an understanding of this sort must be universal; merely general, it is of no use at all. There was present, officially, the superintendent of the shoemaking department (the settlement supplied all the *veld-schoon* required for home consumption). This man was, like most shoemakers, argumentative and, by gift of nature, cantankerous; the sort of person who, in the Established Church, would have been, chronically and wherever his lot might have been cast, an aggrieved parishioner. He had no notion of burying little unpleasantnesses that had not, in his opinion, been half worried. Discussion might be forbidden him, and was; he being not important and universally disliked. But, unfortunately, there was on this occasion another medium of expression open to him: no power on earth could interfere to prevent the ventilating of his sentiments in prayer. Begun, no doubt, in all sincerity of charity and godly interest, it cannot be denied that extempore intercessory prayer made in public is liable to almost intolerable abuse; it may become the vehicle for personalities so outrageous that they would not be endured for an instant in any other form. Brother Simpson had it out on this occasion. He began by a reference, the least ambiguous, to the sin of Eli; then, after a rather confused passage, in which he was vaguely understood to compare the minister's house or household to Zoar, spared a while for the sake of one righteous, he openly requested the meeting to return thanks for the steadfastness of Sister Sarah Arkwright under a recent temptation, praying that her example might be blessed in the quarter where she would most wish it.

Even Sam kicked a little, mentally, and Mr. Glasse was furious. Forbidden by every consideration of position and decency to express anything of his feelings at the meeting, he nursed them in silence till he got home, when, as the two men sat together over their pipes, he relieved his mind by pouring out all the vials of his sympathy with Sam and of his wrath with Brother Simpson. Made cautious by past experience, he did not at first venture to include his daughter-in-law in his animadversions, though it was towards her more hotly than towards any one else that the fire of his anger burned.

"I can't bring myself to think as your wife would really thank him for making a show of her at your expense: a woman must feel

that it don't sound much to her credit to be stuck up that way—even," he glanced furtively at Sam, as though to see how far he might venture, "even if she *do* think much the same herself."

"Sarah had nothing to do with it; don't be a fool, dad," said Sam. But though he spoke impatiently, the minister did not fail to notice that there was less resentment in the tone than he could once have had reason to expect.

"Oh! I'm not hinting anything," he said, deprecatingly. "She's a saint—you said so long ago. As for your poor old dad, he's only flesh and blood, and it goes a bit hard with both to have to hearken to such things as was said this evening. But maybe saints wouldn't mind; maybe they love a man the better for being a bit of a sinner. I can't say."

Sam sprang up from his chair; he thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and began to walk up and down the room with a sort of fling—evidences of disturbance very unusual with him.

"I can't say, either," he exclaimed, "but I'm blessed if it looks much like it!" He gave a rather angry little laugh. "I think the thing was never made that will fetch some people. Anyway, that's not just the kind of loving a man looks for in his wife. She thinks a sight of my soul already, Heaven bless her! Simpson was right enough there. Say, dad, why won't she love *me*?"

The old man made no answer; all the emotions that go to make up senile love and jealousy—and such passions exist—were struggling for the mastery.

"Why don't she, dad?" repeated Sam.

He had stopped in his walk and stood opposite Mr. Glasse's chair, putting his question with a sort of half-humorous, half-impatient lightness of manner which could not disguise the trouble that lay beneath.

The minister put out a hand that trembled a little with age, and more just now, with feeling stronger than beseeemed his years, and his answer was no answer at all.

"I love you, lad," he said; "I have loved you a long time."

He was old, and he was agitated with a sense that he had come to a crisis in that long battle for the sovereignty in his son's affections; his voice, like his hand, was tremulous, and Sam saw a glistering in his eye which touched him strangely. His hand went out to meet the minister's with a grip which, with the twinge of physical pain, brought a thrill of immeasurable satisfaction to the old man's heart; and for once Sam did not laugh away his sentiments, for, indeed, he was not happy.

"Ay, dad," he said, "*you* have never found me so hard to cotton to, have you? I'm not too bad a lot for you?"

"I wouldn't have you different, Sam, not to be a archangel," said the minister, with a defiance at once of propriety and grammar which was not without a soothing effect on his hearer. He laughed much more like his old self.

"Oh! come, dad," he said, "go slow! Blest if you haven't forgotten Eli already!"

And now the minister could afford to chuckle. It had been an insult when Sam had been aggrieved at it; it was a joke now that Sam could take it as one.

It was the last direct word said on that subject then or afterwards. But it was not the last of the minister's diplomacy by any means. He did not indeed discuss Sarah with her husband. But he had a way of meeting the slightest symptoms of annoyance or disappointment on Sam's part with a look or gesture conveying a tacit assurance of such mutual understanding as did not require to be put into words. Indeed, had Sam been allowed to put these little grievances into words they must have stood at once confessed for the phantoms they were. As it was, he was allowed to feel without being allowed to fight them; and with all this sympathy and affection was more really unhappy than he had ever been in his life.

Upon the whole party in this mood came the letter from Beaconsfield, offering the chance of a break. After all, the husband and wife might never have come to a decision if they had been left to themselves. Sarah was too tenacious of every extreme point of duty not to shrink from forcing his hand by any display of the eagerness she felt to be gone. Sam, divided between a sort of resentfulness of the hope she could not disguise, and a foreboding of some blank, worse even than that of disappointment, which lay in wait for him with her absence, could not bring himself to consent without raising difficulties which she felt it wrong to combat with any vigor.

"I suppose you're just wild to go, aren't you, old lady? You'd think me a selfish brute to keep you from her?"

"I have never thought you selfish, Sam," she answered, gently.

"Come, that's something," he said, not without meaning. But she either did not see, or would not accept, the challenge.

"There's really no sense in it," he went on, watching her, as it were. "I promised, when she left, you should go to her in October. There's reason in that; but this is just a fidget. Like enough, by the time you get up, she'll have forgotten she wanted you."

"Very well, Sam."

He laughed a little impatiently.

"What's the use of saying that? You can't help letting me see you would just be breaking your heart."

She shook her head.

"I don't think my heart breaks very easily," she said, like one that knows; "not so easily as all that. I should be sorry—but I dare say you are right—it is just a fancy."

"Do you really care very much about going?" asked Sam, scarcely knowing what answer he wanted.

If, then, she had allowed the cry of her heart to find utterance! if, with tears, she had cried out aloud, "Yes, yes! let me go! I am starving here by inches—starving, heart and soul. Let me go where there is somebody that loves me, and that I love; somebody that can understand! Why should you torture me like this, when it is nothing to you whether I go or stay?—when you would be happier without me—you and him?" If she would only have done this! There are errors of reticence as well as errors of speech; and scarcely can words, the hastiest, the most to be lamented, make more for misunderstanding than can an ill-timed silence. But she would not even listen herself to this importunate wail; freedom even of secret speech was not for that still too rebellious heart of hers. As for outward expression, ever since that one never-to-be-forgiven outbreak she had put a watch on it more severe than ever; no amount of repression could be more than she required.

"Do you, old lady?" said Sam, with a certain touch of anxiety which he could not repress.

"Of course I would like to go," she said; "it's natural, isn't it? But you needn't be afraid I shall fret, if you really want me to stay. You come first, of course, always."

And there was his chance; but, as principle had tied her tongue, so shyness fettered his; the dread of sentiment in cold blood; the sense of raw juvenility which sometimes seized him when she was most reasonable and self-contained. He looked at her for a moment with an expression she could not interpret; then he said:

"Well, we needn't settle it this minute. The governor will be wanting his tea, and it is too late for post to-day, anyhow."

So, after all, it was the minister who settled it. He seemed in better spirits and temper than he had been for months past. The first thing he said was:

"Well, are you pretty well through with the packing? I'm told it's a long job with the ladies always."

That he should address himself to Sarah, and address her amiably and jocosely, was sufficiently surprising to paralyze her powers of speech for the moment. It was Sam who answered:

"We hadn't quite made up our minds about the thing, dad. I was thinking we couldn't spare her just for a fad."

"I'm surprised at you, Sam!" exclaimed the minister, with virtuous indignation. "I should never forgive myself if I were to be that set on my own comfort as to keep Sarah back, things being as they are. It may matter more than you seem to think for. It's like enough poor little Mrs. Runciman must often feel the need of a friend; and you were, more than just that to her, too," he ended, turning again to Sarah.

There was enough genuine good-will in this not very disinterested speech to conciliate the poor girl, who was willing enough to be conciliated, though the good-will was all for Mattie, and not at all for herself. In fact, Mattie had always been rather a favorite with the old man. She had taken a fancy to him from the first, and, mutually flattering, they had mutually liked each other. In a very mild way he was rather sorry when she went, and still when he thought of her at all, it was with real kindness.

Sarah answered with a look so grateful that Mr. Glasse's conscience, little sensitive towards her as it was by this time, pricked him somewhat.

"It's very natural," he added, "and it speaks well for both of you. To be sure, Sam, you must let her go."

And so it was arranged, though Sam was vexed and puzzled, and could not read between the lines of this vigorous support in the way that his wife could. But since she had known for months past that the minister would rejoice to be rid of her, even for ever so short a time, it hurt her feelings very slightly; now, too, she felt she might allow in her heart a little liberty of joy. Sam heard her singing softly to herself next evening as she moved about laying the table; she was humming some little school-song that had been a favorite with Mattie at Marston; but he had never heard her sing over her work before in all the months she had been his wife. He could interpret the sign, and did so with a bitterness of which he had scarcely known himself capable. Sam did a good deal of growing in those forty-eight hours; it was rather a painful process, and the emotion which seemed to grow fastest was a sort of pride, hitherto unknown to him. From the moment he overheard Sarah's singing (which he answered on the spot by an outburst of the liveliest whistling he

could summon up at a moment's notice), he not only suppressed every sign of regret at her departure, but assumed a cheerfulness on his own account which her eyes were not love-clear enough to recognize as feigned.

In the sunset of the next day Sarah, with her husband to drive her, was seated in the cart which was to take her to the Paarl station in time for the night train. Mr. Glasse stood on the stoep to see her off. He had grown quite cordial at the last; had even trotted back to the house himself to fetch another rug for her, for winter was already beginning to make itself felt, and the night journey across the mountains would be cold enough. He had even kissed her before she took her place in the cart; it was the first time since the formal salute with which he had welcomed her when she had crossed his threshold as a bride.

"Good-bye, my dear, and God bless you," he said. "Take care of yourself."

It was the merest formula of benediction, such as, perhaps, he had heard in England from lips that had been old when he was a boy, and which came to his by a sort of association, now that he in his turn was old. But Sarah was glad afterwards to remember he had said it.

The last she saw of him, round the baffling hood of the cart, he was still standing on the stoep, beneath the oak-trees, bare now for the most part, or clothed sparsely with dead brown leaves, rattling with the extremity of dryness. He had stooped to examine some plant in one of the tins—a plant dead now, like the leaves; his head was bare, a slanting ray of sunshine, breaking through the branches, turned his uncovered hair to silver; even as she looked a faded leaf fell upon it. It was evening, and it was autumn. She did not know what sudden passion of relenting, of forgiveness, even of self-reproach, seemed to compress her heart and well up into her eyes in tears.

Sam slept at the Paarl; it was too late to get back after he had seen Sarah off. He rose while the darkness of morning was not in any way to be distinguished from the darkness of night, and by the light of the setting stars drove home alone. The late dawn was gray upon the mountains when the trees that shrouded the settlement came shadowily into sight; by the time he had put up the horses the peaks to the east stood purple and sharp against a faint, far flush of rose; those to the west were already bathed in the gold of a new day. The house door was open; the servant-girl was sweeping onto

the stoep some dead leaves which had drifted into the *voor-kammer*. Sam asked for coffee; it was strange to see him, now, that he should need to ask for any little comfort. At the sound of his step and voice the old minister came out of his room; he was but just dressed. He came up to Sam, and grasped his hand with a vigor which said more than words.

"It's just like old times again, ain't it, lad?" he said, with a sort of senile chuckle.

"Just," said Sam, and drew away his hand a little quickly. Then looked round the room, and felt it empty; felt the emptiness of the whole house; and knew from the bottom of his heart that he had spoken falsely—that the old times were dead beyond hope of resurrection; that nothing would ever be quite the same again.

CHAPTER XX

IF there had been nothing in Runciman's letter explanatory of his statement regarding Mattie's sudden attack of nervousness, there were certain reasons for reticence. The shock which had been the beginning of it could not, indeed, be said to have been exactly his fault; but she had been where he scarcely should have allowed her to go, and the unfortunate result could only have been possible in a condition of things which would not have redounded much to his credit as a minister if it had come to the knowledge of the authorities at headquarters.

After that first informal quarrel there had been a sort of informal reconciliation. Nothing had been said on either side, whether of apology or of explanation. Gerald Blake's name was not only never mentioned again, it was never even alluded to—a most transparent hypocrisy in both, but which yet served to smooth matters over for a time.

When reason had to some extent returned, as it had done by the following morning, Jesse could not but admit that there had been nothing in Mattie's conduct with respect to Blake's visits that need bear an evil construction; he could not accuse her, in this, of the faintest attempt at concealment; while with regard to the past he was now capable of considering that, if Westoby had been Mattie's fellow-traveller, so had Sarah Arkwright. The testimony

of the whole tone and tenor of her manner both to Mattie and to himself, of Mattie's manner to her, was, at least, as well worth taking into consideration as were Westoby's insinuations. All this his reason told him; whether the logic convinced his passions as well as, for the time, it succeeded in silencing them, is another question.

It must be owned that circumstances so far helped him as that no fresh cause of excitement came in his way just now. Westoby was away, this time on legitimate business, having gone down to a sale of mules and wagons on some farm in the colony; and one result, at least, of Mattie's meditations had been a resolution that Gerald Blake should not come to the house again, and she kept it. She could scarcely be said to have been frightened by Jesse's manner after the discovery; she really was not able to understand the violence of the forces with which she played. But in fact she did not wish or mean to exasperate him, to do anything further than amuse—perhaps distract—herself; under all the circumstances anything else would have been incredible. She may not have been striving after any very high ideal of right; but nature itself had given her a safeguard against even the contemplation of serious wrong. Fitfully, indeed, she made at this time quite unwonted efforts to be good in many ways in which she had grown careless enough of late. For some days, too, after the night of their quarrel, she really tried hard to make her husband happy. If she could not quite succeed in that, she succeeded, at least, in enslaving him more than ever.

Then one day she took a fancy into her head. One evening after tea she asked Jesse to wait a minute while she put on her hat and cape; she wanted to go with him to the native service he was accustomed to hold on that night. The proposal was sufficiently amazing, nor did he show any enthusiasm in seconding it.

"You won't like it," he said, demurring; "you know you don't like even to pass a native in the streets."

"Oh, I'm going to get over that," she said. "It's silly, isn't it, to be afraid? After all, they *are* people—just like us. It is silly, isn't it?" she repeated, almost as if she wanted the assurance that it was.

But this was a subject he cared little to discuss. He made no answer; only remonstrated further:

"I really think you had better not come; there'll be nothing but men there."

"It'll be all right if you take me," said Mattie; and, indeed, in

spite of her last remark, she had so little real sense of any common humanity with the natives that the accident of sex in them affected her scarcely more than it did in the lower animals. "I want to see what it's like," she went on, fretfully. "I don't know why you should always seem to think I don't care about your work. Besides, I tell you, I don't want to go on being afraid; I want to get used to them."

"Don't you think there might be better ways?" he asked, helplessly.

"No. Of course I shouldn't like to go with you to the locations, to the heathen ones; but these are all civilized Christians that you have in the chapel on these nights, aren't they?"

"No; these are only preparing for baptism," said Jesse, with a gleam of hope that this might discourage her.

"Oh, well, going to be; it's the same thing; they'll be respectable, at any rate." Jesse's face betokened no certainty whatever on this point, but he did not like to express a doubt which ought not to have existed. "It will be much better to begin with the respectable ones; then, by-and-by, I shall get used to the others — perhaps. I don't *think* I mind them as much as I did," said Mattie. "Now I won't be a minute getting ready."

And as usual he submitted equally against his judgment and his inclination; the time had long passed when he could have summoned up resolution to forbid her anything, however contrary to what he felt to be advisable or even proper.

If Mattie had begun to repent of her determination even before she came to the end of their short walk she made no sign. When they reached the little iron building on the edge of the veld she held her husband's arm rather tight, but put a good face on the matter, and walked up to the top with him bravely enough, though she did not look about her. He put her into a chair, well out of the way of the body of the congregation, took up his own position, and the service began with a hymn, given out line by line.

When Mattie had got over the mingled odor of paraffin and native which, on her first entrance, seemed to take possession of every sense she had, she summoned up courage to look about her. Civilized and respectable! Some, indeed, wore decent suits enough, and looked clean, human, intelligent, and even devout. But of a large proportion of the congregation Mattie's description had certainly not been prophetic. Of these, some were attired in costumes which, if rather original in design, were at least sufficient in extent,

One individual evidently fancied himself immensely in an old soldier's weather-beaten tunic, and a kilt of brilliant-patterned cotton handkerchiefs worn over a pair of old brown trousers. Another boasted not only a kilt, but a jacket of the same elegant material; his arms, legs, and feet were bare, and he wore elaborately worked brass wire bangles round his arms and ankles. But there were others who had not hesitated to come in the congenial simplicity of a blanket only; the draping was in no case classical, and not always entirely satisfactory even from other than an artistic point of view.

Now Runciman had no business to have allowed this. He knew quite well that in no settlement of the community anywhere would such a thing have been tolerated. These were not by way of being raw heathens, of whom all that was required was that they should listen anyhow. As he had said, these were all enrolled catechumens; the most elementary proof of the sincerity of their intentions was, at least, that they should come to their place of worship clean and, as Mattie put it, respectable. Jesse knew this, and felt an occasional twinge of conscience on the subject; but every time he forgot again, nor was this the only point in which his discipline was very defective. Yet as a school-master he had had a good report as a disciplinarian. But here he had no superior in the place; for the first time in his life he was left entirely to his own sense of responsibility; and the plain truth is that many things were done and permitted which would have been very different if he had had to work under fear of inspection. In fact, he was failing; yet failing in a way which deceived even himself with a show of what might be called statistical success. Something, perhaps, was due to inexperience, but unfortunately a great deal more to an ever-growing indifference to everything that was not immediately remunerative in excitement. He dared not live without excitement now.

The class went on; some kind of catechising succeeded the hymn. Mattie sat and stared at the rows of black faces—some dull, some cunning, some more than potentially bestial, with the dullness, the cunning, the bestiality of the savage; if there were better expressions, as no doubt there were, she, blinded by nervous horror, was in no condition to discern them. She watched the bearing, the gestures, the whole indescribable something that marks the even much more than half-reclaimed native; she listened to the voices, the quality as indefinite, as unmistakable for anything

European as all the rest. She looked at Jesse; he was giving an address now, speaking alone; his voice, always rather curious in *timbre* when he was roused, seemed all at once to receive its natural interpretation. It was to such speech that such tones should be wedded. He stood looking over his congregation; was it altogether Mattie's fancy that seemed to trace, more and more as his excitement increased, a something—it was as if the veil of the generations were thinning, rolling back. A great horror of nervousness began to creep over Mattie. For all the cold outside, the ill-ventilated building was hot and close; she began to feel faint, at once with terror and physical oppression. And then came the climax. Some movement among the rows suddenly revealed to her a thing so ghastly that stronger nerves than hers might have owned to a momentary shock the first time of seeing it. A face whose blackness was scarred and gashed with livid stripes; the eyes peered horribly out of wide, pallid circles, beneath which the lower part of the face seemed to vanish in darkness. It was horrible; a moving corpse, animated out of corruption by some evil power which still glittered in the eyes that rolled in those livid sockets. Mattie was not in the habit of studying such natives as she could not help seeing in her daily walks with any attention; and it chanced she had never before seen one got up artistically with yellow ochre. This, indeed, was the whole explanation; that he should have ventured to come to such a place so got up required, perhaps, explanation of another kind, but that must have been demanded of Jesse Runciman.

She did not scream, simply because she was too frightened; she sat, paralyzed, one hand stretched out instinctively towards Jesse, in a sort of appeal for protection, but her eyes fixed, riveted on that horror in the crowd. At last a little moan forced its way between her parted lips. Jesse heard it, and turned round. Her face startled him scarcely less than the native had startled her. She could not speak, only turned her hand slowly, and pointed down the chapel. His eyes followed her sign, and then, of course, he understood. He interrupted himself for a second to whisper, hastily: "It's only paint;" whereupon, in the mingled absurdity and ecstasy of relief, she broke down in a sudden storm of hysterical tears and laughter. There was nothing for it but to bring the class to an abrupt conclusion, and, horribly ashamed and annoyed—more, to do him justice, with himself than with her—that was what he did. She was not long in recovering herself after that, but was

trembling too much to walk. He had to take her home in a cart.

She spent a disturbed night, sleeping only to wake starting and screaming continually. He had plenty of opportunity for renewing his terribly futile resolutions that he really would look after things a little better. She persisted in rising at the usual time; but half an hour later he found her sobbing in the passage, her hand on the kitchen door, which she had not courage to open, because Sixpence (the Kaffir house-boy) was in there, and she could not bear to come near him, to see him; he reminded her of that dreadful man—she should never forget him, never.

Jesse, who by this time was considerably ashamed of that dreadful man, soothed her as well as he could, though with little success, till he undertook that Sixpence should be kept out of her sight till she felt she had quite got over her fear of him; he should go for a holiday; they would get in some white woman or Cape girl to help for a week or so, till she had got over her fright; she would not mind a Cape girl.

So by degrees she was comforted, and got through the day pretty well, though looking strangely white and scared. It was not a common expression with Mattie, yet she could look most piteously scared. But with the coming of night the terror seemed to increase tenfold; not even the lamplight could dispel it; Jesse could do nothing with her. Presently she began to cry for Sarah; and so it came to pass that—not indeed at once, and not without reluctance—Jesse was driven at last, when this sort of thing had been repeated for two or three evenings, to write the request which they had received at Beulah.

Not without reluctance. He did not ask himself why. In old days, though far from appreciating her at her true worth, he had taken a somewhat condescending yet real pleasure in Sarah's society. Now he felt a certain secret uneasiness at the remembrance of the high spiritual levels on which she was used to walk; for so slightly as he ever cared to examine himself now—ever since that day on the veld, which had left him with pride alone to do the work of mortally wounded self-respect—he still could not feel that he was really going on well; that his life, outwardly unimpeachable, rested on any satisfactory basis. He shut his eyes to this; hid it from himself in every way he possibly could. But there was left a nameless fear that he might in some way betray himself. With his temperament he could but be by nature a poor dissembler; by means of constant

excitement in other directions, he could and did make himself forget troubles, passions, temptations, but he had little power of disguise whenever he was consciously in their grasp. He had not yet begun to work under a master who had such discipline in store for him as he had never even imagined.

CHAPTER XXI

SARAH came; and, for the first hours, Jesse's fears vanished. "Peace be to this house, and to all that are in it." The benediction seemed to breathe from her very presence, to brood, for a brief while at least, over this home where there had been little enough of peace of late. She was, too, so undisguisedly happy to be there that she shed a sort of reflected happiness all round her; it was flattering that she should be so glad, and that alone would have been soothing. If Sam could have seen Mattie's welcome, at any rate he would not have found it wanting. She clung to her friend, kissing her again and again, scarcely willing to let her out of her sight for a moment. Even when, at Mattie's own entreaty, Sarah had gone to lie down after two very indifferent nights in the train, even then the little hostess could not keep away altogether; she would open the door softly now and again, putting her head in for a moment, as though to assure herself that Sarah was actually there.

The first day of the visit really left nothing to be desired from any one's point of view. That evening, which was one of those Jesse spent at home, Mattie, for the first time since her fright, did not keep up a constant nervous wandering of the eyes to every corner of the room, especially towards the doors and window. They all three sat and talked; there was nothing remarkable in the conversation, but the whole tone and atmosphere of that evening was indescribably different to anything either husband or wife had known for long weeks. Perhaps they had never known it at all, that atmosphere too rare for the breathings of passion, too still for the flutterings of frivolity.

The next day there was one of the committee meetings, more frequent now as the bazaar drew near. Mattie went off early in the afternoon, before the time that she was required to be there; she said she had some shopping to do first. She did not ask Sarah to

accompany her, for the sufficient reason that she fully expected to meet Gerald Blake in the course of her shopping expedition; she had not exactly made an appointment, but she would have been much surprised if he had failed to appear. So she contented herself with commending Sarah to Runciman for entertainment.

"Take her round and show her the place and some of your people, and that. She will like that ever so much better than going after wicked worldly things with poor me; won't you, Grannie, dear?" she said, and smothered any possible answer in a hug.

Then she tripped away, and there was an end of Jesse's peace of mind for the next four-and-twenty hours at the least. When she was gone he made not even so much offer of seconding her suggestion as to Sarah's amusement as the commonest civility required. He remained standing by the window, and Sarah, looking up for a moment from her sewing, noticed how worn and almost haggard his face appeared, seen thus in the full light. She did not wonder at this; how natural that the increased burden of responsibility—that responsibility which even in prospect he had felt so deeply—should have told upon a temperament at once so sensitive and so conscientious! Suddenly he spoke.

"What do you think of Mattie?" he began, abruptly. "Have I taken enough care of her to satisfy you?" he added, with a very forced laugh, as if to detract from any appearance of particular meaning in his first words.

The rare low laugh with which she answered was a sound of pure content.

"Indeed I was delighted to see how well she looked," she said. "I had been half afraid when we got your letter."

"Oh! I didn't want to frighten you into coming," he said, as before. "Yes; I think she is well. And—and happy?"

"Surely," said Sarah, without a shadow of doubt.

Happy! how should she be anything else?

He had come up to the table, and stood fidgeting with a reel of cotton. His whole soul seemed to quiver and ache with the craving he had to ask a question; he could no more force it through his dry throat, between his nervously twitching lips, than the curse-laden mariner could force a prayer. For a moment he fought for the utterance from which at once shame and an unspeakable dread held him thus almost physically back. Then he gave it up; a sudden panic terror of what the answer might be, of what that truth was like behind her veil, swept over him as with a shriek of warn-

ing deprecation. In haste, to cover a silence which seemed now as if it must be suspicious, he put some trifling question about Beulah; then another and another, as fast as she could answer them. She was touched, and pleased that, in all his work, his new interests, he had not forgotten.

"You think about us sometimes still, then," she said, with one of her old really cheerful smiles.

"Yes," he said, vaguely. He began to walk about the room, his head bent, his face working. "Ay! those were my happy days," he said; and his speech was like a sigh.

She could understand so well!

"He that now goeth forth, and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, and bring his sheaves with him," she said, gently. "One cannot have the blessedness without the burden, can one? not here. But you would not give up any of that blessedness to be rid of the sorrow, would you?"

He looked, he felt, like one to whom, after long oblivious years of exile, should be addressed the language of his infancy; so strange, yet so fraught with memories was such speech now to his soul. He answered, but with the ambiguity of a sigh; what could he else? At that moment he feared almost his tongue might trip over the once familiar strain. Only, to make a change in a situation which threatened to become intolerable, he now proposed that they should follow Mattie's suggestion and go out to see the place. Sarah assented gladly.

"Do you remember the last time I went a walk with you—the afternoon you went to Tygerfontein?" she said, as she stood up to put away her work-materials. "You told me about that wonderful night you spent in the hut with that poor native and the Englishman. You didn't know how happy that story made me; but I had been feeling—it was wrong, I know, but I did—as if everybody was very lukewarm, as if the days when the Lord wrought mightily for His people had been over very long ago. And then that just put me in heart again; I remembered about those seven thousand that He had left Him in Israel; I saw that He was always reviving His work in the midst of the years."

She was folding up her sewing and did not look at him as she spoke, or even she must almost have guessed something from his face. He seemed to physically wince and writhe beneath her words. He thought that till that hour he had never known what shame meant.

"Don't talk about that," he said, almost harshly, in a smothered voice.

She looked up, a little surprised; but his face was well turned away by now—she could not see it.

"Why should I not speak of a great triumph of His grace?" she said, gently. "I have given thanks for it many, many times since then. But I won't talk about it to you, if you had rather not. Maybe you are right; I suppose the temptation to bow down to our own nets comes to all of us too easily, anyhow; one oughtn't, one wouldn't for worlds, of course, make things any harder to others for any pleasure, or even help, to one's self. Only I thought I should like you to know."

She went out, and left him to such reflections as might occur to him: They were not so attractive but that he was positively glad to see her back, ready for her walk; he thought she could scarcely have anything worse to say; besides, he was seized with a furious desire to rehabilitate himself in his own eyes towards her, who dreamed of no need for rehabilitation. He could easily do it, easily. For if the sequel to that particular episode had been a fiasco (a thing, after all, she could not know), had he not plenty to show her that was not so? Certainly, he had plenty. His pride was up in arms, desperately on the defensive; every shred or shadow of success with which he could flatter himself as the outcome of his ministerial labors assumed proportions which even he would have hesitated to see in them under ordinary circumstances—far too ready though he was, in these days, to accept the merest emotional surface-work as valid conversion.

Whether or not he quite succeeded in comforting himself by the exhibition, he at least showed her enough, and still more told her enough, to confirm her in her spiritual hero-worship. She scarcely cared to hide from him a sentiment which in her was pure almost to abstraction; she regarded him, indeed, less as a personality than as a thrice-blessed consciously devoted instrument of a Power behind, which she never forgot, though he did.

They got home before Mattie, who came back, eager and hurried, only just in time to get ready the evening meal. She seemed tired, but she would not let Sarah do this work for her, or even help her. In fact, it was one of the compromises she had made with her conscience from the first that her amusement should never interfere with her husband's actual bodily comfort; the house was not less well kept, nor was any meal ill-served or unpunctual on

excuse of outward business; and she clung to her principle with tenacity.

Runciman went out directly after tea: it was one of his working evenings; the meal had scarcely been so pleasant as that of the night before. Jesse was preoccupied, not to say sullen. His wife understood his mood well enough, but she was quite shrewd enough, also, to feel sure that Sarah would not understand it, would supply her own interpretation; so she did not exert herself to cover his social deficiencies. Her confidence was justified, for Sarah supposed him to be absorbed by the thought of his approaching duties, and was contentedly and respectfully silent not to distract him.

Mattie allowed Sarah to help her clear away and wash up. The cinnamon-tinted young person who had succeeded Sixpence had gone home for the night, according to the almost universal custom.

"Yes," Mattie admitted, "I am rather tired. Yet I was sitting still for the last hour, and I came back in a cab; but I seem to have been in a scramble all the afternoon."

And, emotionally, so she had.

They went back into the living-room, and sat down at the table, opposite one another. Sarah took up some sewing. Mattie made a feint of doing the same, but, after collecting her materials, she proceeded no further. She sat, rather wearily, idle, with one elbow on the table, and her face resting on her hand, silently watching the swift regular motions of Sarah's fingers, and the occasional gleam of her needle in the lamplight. Sarah suggested that she should take a little rest, but she refused.

"I'm really more lazy than anything else," she said; "it rests me quite enough to see *you* there. It was very good of you to come, Grannie, dear," she added, with a little sigh as of content.

"It is very good to *be* here," said Sarah; and if ever a tone came from the heart, hers did then.

"I knew I'd feel all right if you were here," continued Mattie; "and I haven't seen that dreadful man again since you came. I used to see him every night; he came up to the window, and flattened his horrid face against the glass and grinned."

She laughed a little, but shuddered, too, glancing at the window, still half-askance.

"Dearie, there is nobody there," said Sarah, soothingly.

"I know," said Mattie, a little impatiently. "Of course I know he was never there at all, really; I know it was only fancy, but that did not make it any better."

She shuddered again; the look of intolerable loathing which was the worst part of this special form of terror in her passed for a moment across her face. "You don't know how horribly, horribly frightened I was that first minute. I think you can never have been so frightened of anything in all your life. I almost wonder I didn't die;" and she spoke with conviction. "Of course there was no time afterwards quite so bad as that; but it has been bad enough. And, oh!" she went on, with a sudden change of tone, which was like a swift passionate caress, "I'm *glad* you're come."

"My poor dear, my Mattie! I never guessed it had been as bad as that."

"I know it's awfully silly," said Mattie; "and yet—I was trying—that's just how it came to happen at all. Well, I'll never try that way again, that's certain," she concluded, with decision.

Sarah did not understand, perhaps she scarcely heard, her heart was so full of motherly distress at the thought of what Mattie had suffered.

"But you haven't been like this all the time since you saw him, dearie?" she asked, deprecating her own distress. "Surely you weren't all those evenings alone; Mr. Runciman isn't out every night?"

Mattie gave a sudden quick glance at the speaker; it was exceedingly, almost imperceptibly swift, but it was a very strange one.

"*That* didn't prevent anything," she said. It seemed as if she would have spoken further; yet what she did add was in no sense a continuation either as to manner or matter. "Never mind!" she exclaimed, as if resolutely throwing off a burden, "it will be all right now. You've cured me, Grannie," she added, with one of the old coaxing smiles of her school-days. "I don't suppose that'll come back again ever, now you've once got rid of it for me. Now I'm not going to be lazy any more."

She sprang into a sudden briskness which made her more like the Mattie of old days than she had been all that evening. Yet the first piece of delicate stitchery which she took out of her basket did not seem to be to her liking just now. She handled it a little, threaded her needle as slowly as in her idlest fits at Marston, put in a stitch or two in the same fashion. Then all at once she threw it down again.

"I must get on with the bazaar work," she said. "There's more hurry about that."

She crumpled the tiny garment into a sort of ball, and threw it at

Sarah's head as she bent unsuspectingly over her sewing; when Sarah looked up startled she laughed out as merrily, as saucily, as ever she had laughed over her innocent practical jokes in the days that were gone.

"Put away that stupid old mending, and do some of this for me, there's a dear," she said, coaxingly. "I shall like to see *you* doing it."

"Will you let me?" said Sarah, as if incredulous of a favor too great.

She took it up, smoothed it out; one would almost have said she fondled it, but that there was something of reverence in the way she handled it; all her still, pale face seemed to grow moved and brighter. Mattie looked at her with a sort of almost superior amusement; her own hands, which had moved so languidly a moment since, were brisk and busy enough now among bright ribbons and laces, and dainty materials of all kinds.

"It had better have been you, Grannie," she said at last, with a laugh through which one might barely guess a sigh.

Sarah guessed more. For a moment the shadow of a shade quenched the soft light of her face, but it was on her own account. The shade passed, if the brightness did not quite return.

"He hath done all things well," she said, humbly. "It might have been a snare. I should have made an idol—" She paused; then in a tone which was almost passionate, she said, "Oh, Mattie, aren't you happy?"

"Of course I am; people always are, aren't they?" said Mattie, a little quickly, a little even as it were on the defensive. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"I didn't mean that!" said Sarah, shocked at having seemed to make such an insinuation. "I meant *how* happy you must be! You couldn't be anything else, of course."

"Of course not," repeated Mattie, still with that touch of defiance.

After that they sat in silence for a while; presently Sarah became aware that Mattie's eyes were fixed upon her with a curious intensity of scrutiny. She had dropped her sewing as if unconsciously; her arms were folded on the table; it seemed almost as if she were trying to get her friend's face by heart.

"What is it, dearie?"

"Nothing; I was thinking."

Sarah smiled a little; it was a novel sort of explanation from Mattie.

"I was wondering who you were like." She paused, then laughed a little. "How queer it is to know so little about one's belongings as we do—you and me. We just know who our fathers and mothers were, and that's all; we don't even know what they were like to look at. I suppose we must have uncles and aunts and cousins somewhere—most people have; perhaps we take after some of them."

"Maybe," said Sarah, laughing too. "What has put that into your head?"

"Oh! I don't know. But it is queer, isn't it? We must be like somebody, I suppose. I wonder who I favor?" she went on, persistently. "Perhaps I take after my grandmother; I must have had one once, mustn't I?"

She was looking, as it were, furtively at Sarah now, bringing out the sentences in little jerks with aimless, rather forced, giggles between; she seemed to be watching the effect of them on her friend.

"Do people ever take after their grandmothers?" she went on; "perhaps after their *great*-grand—folks? No; I should think that would be too far back, shouldn't you? Fathers and mothers, or uncles and aunts, but not grandmothers, let alone great-grandmothers. Shouldn't you think so?"

She seemed really to want an answer to her sudden string of speculations.

"I don't know, dearie, at all. I never thought about it. As you say, it don't seem likely. Still, I've known children that everybody said weren't like any of their belongings; maybe they had taken back to their grandfathers or grandmothers—or further still. One can't tell."

"No," said Mattie, and now she smothered a sigh, "one can't tell. One can never be sure—of *what* may happen—in that way."

She fixed her eyes on Sarah again; and now there was in them something of the inexplicable look that her face had worn once before that night. She looked till it had passed, then—

"I wish baby may be like you!" she exclaimed abruptly, and seemingly in all seriousness.

"Like me!" exclaimed Sarah, and this time she laughed with pure amusement. "What a thing to wish, even if it could be! What odd things you are saying to-night, dearie."

"I don't see anything odd in that," returned Mattie, with a touch of offence. "I'm sure it couldn't take after any one better," she added, with one of her most bewitching transitions of mood. "And

if you come to odd—I often think much”—she hesitated, as if for an epithet—“much *odder* things than that.” But the little sort of shiver which caught her breath as she ceased pointed to a more tragic definition of her thoughts. As if in fear that Sarah might guess as much, she went on hastily, with a sudden change of tone and subject which was like enough to the volatile Mattie of old: “Isn’t that the old shell-pincushion I brought you back from Skelthorpe the autumn I had been at the Convalescent Home, after I had had the fever so badly? To think of your having that still!”

“Dearie,” said Sarah, tenderly, with that wistful, motherly tenderness of hers, “I think there is nothing you ever gave me in your life that I have not got by me somewhere.”

Mattie jumped up from her seat and ran across to her friend as if she were indeed that little girl again. She put her arms round Sarah’s neck, and kissed her in the way for which the elder girl’s heart had hungered so long. Then she sat down on the floor beside her and laid her head against Sarah’s knee. She turned the poor little gift, with its faded velvet and gap-toothed shell-work, idly over in her fingers.

“What a hideous thing it is!” she laughed, “and I remember I thought it so beautiful then! How long ago that was! I was ten years old then—just half of all my life ago. I was very ill that time, wasn’t I?”

“Very; we thought we should have lost our Mattie.”

“You would have been very sorry, wouldn’t you? I wonder,” she went on, with a half-disguised seriousness—“I wonder if you could ever come to think it would have been a good thing? if anything could ever make you think it would have been better if I had died then?”

“My Mattie! what a thing to think of! Of course not.”

“Not even if I was very, very unhappy? more unhappy than you could bear to think of?”

Sarah thought a moment.

“No,” she said then, firmly, “not even then. Because if you missed some of the suffering you might miss some of the glory, too. But I hope you will never be so unhappy as all that, dearie; I hope you will have as little to bear always as anybody can,” she ended, with pathetic illogicalness.

Mattie reached up after her friend’s hand, and fondled it against her own cheek.

“There isn’t anything could make you wish such a thing then?”

she went on with what seemed to Sarah a whimsical persistence. "Not anything at all?"

"Nothing—except, perhaps, sin. But why should we think of such a dreadful thing as that?" she said, soothingly. Mattie must certainly be much more tired than she would admit, she thought, to persist in such a curious mood.

Mattie remained silent for a moment after that. Then she suddenly half-raised herself from the floor, and clasping her hands on Sarah's knee, looked up into her face; her own was strangely wistful.

"If I ever did do anything very wicked; if I got very, very bad indeed, so as nobody would have anything to say to me any more—would you give me up, too?"

"I could never give you up, dearie," she said, simply; yet no protestations could have done other than weaken the effect of her tone.

"I'm glad," said Mattie, as simply. "Because," she went on, with a sudden strange passion—"because if I thought *you* would ever give me up, whatever happened, I shouldn't care to try to be good any more at all."

That was not very logical, either; but Sarah understood—the feeling, at least; but of any cause for it, other than a not inexplicable nervous depression, she had no faintest suspicion. Perhaps, however, Mattie thought she had gone too far, for she laughed all at once. "But I'm *not* very wicked, you know, Grannie," she said, "and I'm not unhappy—not at all. It only came into my head."

"Your poor little head is tired," said Sarah, pityingly. "That's all there is wrong, I know."

Mattie laid it back, with a sort of cuddling, reposeful movement, in its former position.

"Sing me to sleep, then, Grannie," she said, lazily, with a little laugh.

Sarah laughed too; she began some childish rhyme.

"No," said Mattie, with a spoilt-child petulance which was not exactly what she felt, "not that. You remember that old hymn you used to sing to the little ones at Marston? something about a cradle—a nice sleepy old hymn. Sing me that."

Sarah obeyed without remark, though it was the first time in her life she had ever heard Mattie ask for a hymn. She sang it through once in her low, soft contralto—a voice neither rich nor clear, but very tender. She sang it half through again; and then she went on

for a few moments longer in a gentle, wordless croon; for the little black curly head rested more heavily against her knee, the thick, black lashes lay drooping upon the soft, rounded cheek; the breath came and went as gently and regularly as an infant's. Mattie was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

PERHAPS, after all, Sarah had been right, and mere bodily fatigue accounted for Mattie's mood that night. Certainly there was no trace left of it next day; nor, in fact, did she ever again allude to those strange spectres of sin and sorrow, of something mysterious which was neither sin nor sorrow, yet as terrible as both. She did not even seem to be haunted by such thoughts in secret. To all appearance her spirits were excellent, nor could the most acute observer have seen any reason to suspect that they were feigned. Indeed, they were not. In the protection of Sarah's presence her troubles, real and shadowy, had vanished, not into nothingness, but into oblivion.

Altogether, for two out of the three days at least, that was a happy visit. It was all too brief. On the afternoon of its tenth day, on her return from a walk, Sarah found a telegram awaiting her. She tore it open with a foreboding; she read it with a little cry of distress.

"Father dangerously ill, we fear dying. Come at once."

It was a great shock; for in the one letter she had received from her husband, two days before, the only hint given of any illness of the minister had been nothing more alarming than that "the governor seems to have got a little chill; he potters about over his gardening too much for an old chap in this sort of weather." But it is probable that her distress—and she was distressed—was largely on account of Sam. To him, indeed, her heart went out in his trouble, as it did to all suffering creatures, with a longing to comfort which actually made the hours that must elapse before she could leave Beaconsfield go slowly for her. Yet at the last moment, when her tearful eyes strained for the second time after the last sight of Mattie, her holiday seemed to her to have been short indeed.

There was one to whom it had seemed all too long. To Jesse it was a relief that she was gone, she and her innocent cruelties. He

was glad, and did not suspect that, in refusing once again to apply the discipline, he was simply preparing for himself a chastisement of scorpions.

The day of the bazaar came. Towards the middle of the morning Mattie summoned her husband to the parlor to see her in her festal adornments before she set off. If there had been some little loss of the old sparkle and color in her of late, for to-day at least she had regained it all. In her gown, of some soft yet bright rose-color, her charming little head just crested, as it were, above the curly blackness with the filmy white of her tiny coquettish cap; with her eyes, her feet, her whole person dancing, sparkling, fluttering with excitement, she looked like some brilliant foreign bird just alighted there in the sunshine.

For a moment he forgot. In the intoxication of her brightness, her revived beauty, he forgot that it was not for him. He made a step forward to take her in his arms; to hold that loveliness; to put it from him, then, that seeing might enhance the rapture of clasping it again. Mattie saw the blaze in his eyes, which she had learned to know too well. She drew back, waving him off daintily.

"You mustn't touch me!" she exclaimed. "I want to get there nice and fresh—as fresh as one can for this horrid dust."

She was looking down at herself, coquettishly, complacently; not at him, who stepped aside with something in his face that might have startled her. She proceeded to take off her cap and apron; then she put on her hat, and covered her butterfly splendors with the sober little ulster which had been part of her Marston outfit. Then she looked round the room.

"Mind you see that 'Stina makes you comfortable," she said. "I've told her everything, but her head is like a sieve. I'm ashamed to go and leave the room in this state" (and, indeed, it was untidy enough, littered all over with the accumulation of two days' packing and unpacking of parcels, and so forth); "but I really haven't had a minute to put things straight. You won't mind for to-day? You had better not expect me back any before ten; Mrs. Wheeler is going from here—she'll bring me home. Oh, there's the cab—good-bye!" She threw him a kiss, airily, with her finger-tips. "I do hope you'll be comfortable," she added, with genuine earnestness.

By this time he had mastered himself outwardly with a really terrible effort.

"Oh, I shall do very well," he said, almost boisterously. "I—I hope you'll enjoy yourself."

She nodded; the next moment she was gone. He went back into the room and stared at the empty strip of sunshine where she had stood, brilliant, unapproachable, repulsing him. He thought now that he hated her. How dared she—how dared she play with him like this? Yet he was only fighting with shadows. He had not one fact to go upon with which he could actually confront and reproach her; he had never heard a word, never caught a look which he could accuse as having wronged him. He had never even seen them together.

Suddenly a passionate desire seized him to do that, at least; to make use of this opportunity to satisfy himself. It would be so easy to do that: let her even be on her guard, there was little fear that she would succeed in blinding him. And she would not be on her guard; neither of them would be. Before they knew that he was near at all, he would have been able to judge—to recognize his position as heaven or as hell.

Still, he held out for a while; the body does sometimes resist for a time after the foundations have been sapped in the soul. The long, blank hours dragged on. On many mornings there would have been distractions—people coming for assistance, temporal or spiritual, or on business. To-day there were none; not a creature came near the place. He sat and dawdled over his writing till dinner-time, then went in to his solitary meal.

It was a mere farce; he left it, practically, untouched. He was just in the condition in which many a man flies to stimulants; but, mercifully for Jesse, he had taken the pledge years since, on his conversion, and abstinence had become by this time so much a second nature that this remedy did not even occur to his imagination.

The ten minutes or so occupied by this so-called meal just sufficed to unsettle him, and that was all. He hung about in and out of the rooms and did not well know what to do with himself, and the more he indulged his restlessness the more it grew. He began to repent his resolution of staying in-doors. After all, it was foolish; he would be less haunted if he were to go out. He took his hat and went out, accordingly; and once he had allowed himself that, there was an end of it. He made almost as many excuses as he took steps; but nobody but himself could have been surprised to find him, half-an-hour later, wandering about the streets of Kimberley in the immediate neighborhood of the Town Hall, drifting a little nearer with every turn he took; his reasonableness a little less, his anxiety a little greater, with the passage of every moment.

Perhaps he really deserved to meet Westoby; at any rate, this was not spared him. He was standing staring with his bodily eyes into a shop-window in New Main Street, with the vision of his mind very much elsewhere, feeling that he had given in, and preparing himself to give in even more completely, from a sort of angry despair at his acknowledged failure, when his enemy caught sight of him. Westoby was on the other side of the street, and he doubted for a moment whether it would be worth while to cross over. He knew perfectly well where Runciman would be going, and he really did not care to make superfluous mischief when circumstances and his victim's temperament amply sufficed for the work. But, on the whole, he decided that to give a little stir to the devil's brew he had set boiling could do no harm, and might quicken a process which there was no use in needlessly prolonging.

He came across just as Jesse was turning away from his sightless contemplation. The young man would have passed on with no more than his usual unwilling tribute in the way of recognition, but he was not allowed. The remark on the weather which stopped him was innocent enough, but it did stop him, which was all it was meant to do.

"Good weather for the bazaar folks, too," Westoby went on, nodding towards where a string of flags across the street marked the spot. "They'll be doing well."

"Yes," said Jesse, vaguely. He paused; then added, desperately, "Have you been in?"

"Oh, I gave a look round, just now, as I happened to be passing." Of course he had never been near the place, and would not have dreamed of making so improbable an assertion on his own initiative; but if Runciman showed himself thus prepared to believe it, why, so much the better. "Were you thinking of looking in?"

"I—I thought, perhaps—that is, I hadn't quite made up my mind. I don't much care for bazaars. But one ought to—to show a little interest in—in—" faltered Jesse.

Westoby gave him a look; it was the look which, at one time or another, had made, probably, all his thralls in turn feel how uselessly they had lied to him—which is, in itself, a demoralizing sensation.

"Ah, to be sure," he said; "it's for the foot-ball club, ain't it? Yes, you would be interested; folks would expect it of you. You go in a good deal for that sort of thing, don't you?"

Jesse bit his lips, wild with rage and shame—yet dumb, too, as he seemed doomed to stand before this man.

"For all that," continued Westoby, without seeming to notice his discomfiture, "if you ain't quite made up your mind to go, I reckon, if I was you, I'd make it up to keep away. I've been in, you see, and that would be my advice."

Jesse's voice choked on his question, but Westoby found it convenient to supply an interpretation.

"Slow, did you say? Oh no!" with a sufficiently expressive grin, "not that, I shouldn't say—not for the stall-holders and that lot, any way. Oh, not at all; no."

His eyes seemed to twinkle at some hilarious recollection.

"What do you mean?" cried Jesse, his fury bursting at last into words.

"Oh, nothing much—only that two's company, and—well, likely you know what three is. Ay, I reckon I'd keep away."

The devil of his late possession, exorcised for so brief a space, came back with sevenfold rage. The first oath that had passed his lips since the days of his turbulent boyhood broke from them now; he turned and went down the street at a pace which instinct alone kept from being quite a run.

Westoby leisurely pursued his own path.

"Not so bad—for a minister of religion," he said to himself. "But you wait a bit, my boy; I've a deal more for you to learn yet—more of all sorts, you bet."

Meanwhile, Runciman had reached the Town Hall. When he entered, the bazaar was not at its briskest. The room could not be called empty, but there was a comparative lull in the proceedings: all but a few of the most conscientious saleswomen showed a certain languor in their office; some had gone off duty altogether, and were strolling about with a few rare cavaliers, or comparing notes with fellow-stall-holders across the way. Still, there was sound and movement: a band was just concluding some operatic selection; the place was full of a sort of subdued murmur of steps and voices, incessant, indistinguishable. Not the roar of the full flood of traffic, nor the kaleidoscopic, evanescent effect of such a moving crowd as would be there in the evening; yet enough to stifle with its indifferent chorus, to cover with its unsuspecting smile, a fair number of little tragedies and comedies, of which Runciman's was, after all, only one.

Another, springing from the same root as his own, yet of whose

very existence he was unconscious, much more of its common origin, confronted him almost as he entered the room. Sophy de Jongh stood leaning against the counter in front of her stall, in a rather monumental attitude of depression. Her meek eyes were dull with it; her whole bearing, never vivacious, too patently acknowledged in every line the sorrows of her simple soul. Yet she stood at her post like an unromantic Casabianca; in all the room there was not a girl so conscientious as Sophy. If her heart had been fairly breaking, she would still have done her somewhat heavy best to tempt or suit a purchaser; if by quitting her stall she could have secured the happiness of a lifetime, it is doubtful whether she could quite have reconciled her conscience to the step.

Jesse Runciman came straight up the room like one in a dream; of all its sights there were none for him, since, look around him as he might, the one which filled his soul was not to be seen. Moving mechanically, avoiding obstacles with the unconscious caution of a somnambulist, he stopped at last in front of Sophy's stall: stopped simply because there was no apparent means of going farther.

"Can I sell you anything, Mr. Runciman?"

He looked up from the counter, over which his restless eyes were wandering; and turned their hungry, half-conscious gaze upon the speaker. At that moment he had not the dimmest recollection of ever having seen her before; not that it surprised him to hear her mention his name—nothing surprised, or moved, or distracted him now. What was it all but the phantasmagoria of a dream? In all the world were only three realities—himself, and *her*, and another.

Something was put into his hand; with a vague idea that he had been asked to pay for it, he began to feel automatically in his pocket. Then he did not even withdraw his hand; he stood forgetting everything in the momentary belief that he had caught sight of Mattie. It was not she; but his eyes, his whole person, seemed suddenly to start into consciousness at the thought.

"Were you looking for Mrs. Runciman?" asked Sophy. The touch of spite in her voice was very small and very little venomous; she must have been almost more than human for it to have been absent altogether.

"I saw her go into the tea-room, a little while ago, with Mr. Blake. I don't think they have come back."

The light that leapt into his eyes then made that of a moment before seem pale and unmeaning. With a look she did not care to

see, he flung a handful of money upon the counter, recklessly, as it were desperately, and was gone.

One of Sophy's defaulting assistants strolled up, giggling; she looked at the little newly-scattered heap of coin.

"Goodness! Sophy, you are a good seller. How do you manage?—and in the slack hours, too! Actually gold—half-a-sovereign. If only we could all do like that!"

Sophy, glancing askance at it, looked more scared than pleased.

"Put it away for me, dear," she said, plaintively; she never came nearer than this to being cross.

Somehow she did not like to handle it herself; this gold touched a very unsophisticated conscience, which was less obtuse than her perceptions, with a sense of crime. Sophy was a dull woman, but she had her emotions, and they were little less primitive than the man's passions. Still they were but emotions; they enabled her, indeed, to interpret him, but with fright and remorse, not with sympathy.

"Listen!" said Gerald Blake.

On a settee, in one corner of the smaller room set apart for refreshments, behind an artistic arrangement of ornamental shrubs and Japanese screens, sat Mattie Runciman; Gerald was lounging beside her. His attitude, though graceful, was quite sufficiently free and easy; hers, as she sat turned somewhat aside, one little hand tossing over the bunches of fast-fading flowers in the smart beribboned basket on her lap, betrayed a certain amount of embarrassment which yet was not all unpleasant. In fact, Gerald was getting very reminiscent and sentimental; there were circumstances which made him feel rather reckless just now—he did not greatly care what he said or did, or what might come of anything. The circumstances, indeed, were such as—morality apart—ought to have rendered him very particularly prudent and circumspect; but that was not Gerald's way. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

The air was hot and languorous; the half-sweet, half death-sickening odor of flowers touched by the first breath of decay came stealing up from Mattie's basket; the sound of the band from the farther room came softened to them as they sat—some sort of slow, regretful valse.

From reminiscences he fell to pleading—pleading with that too low insinuating voice, even more with those beautiful pathetic eyes.

Half-laughing, half-pettishly, she pushed the basket towards him. He waved it back, pointed to a rosebud she wore among the lace at her throat; his hand crept towards it. With a sudden blush she pulled it out and tossed it over to him. He came yet nearer.

"I can't thank you enough," he murmured. "Mayn't I show you how I thank you? May I?"

He took her hand, ever so gently—so humbly; tried to lift it. She twisted about a little in his hold.

"You won't refuse me that?" he said. "So little!"

She resisted for the brief moment in which she could still look him in the face; then as her eyes wavered, turned away, and fell, her hand lay motionless but for a tremulous flutter, like that in the breast of a startled bird. He bent towards it; his lips touched it—

"Come, Mattie, it is time to go home." She could scarcely blush more vividly than she was doing then; but she could not repress a little start and scream. The next instant she had recovered herself; but she did not feel particularly reassured.

"Oh! Jesse, it's you, is it? How you made me jump! What do you want? I can't go home yet, you know, it isn't possible." She spoke hurriedly—a little nervously. "What is it? Hasn't Christina—"

"Go and get ready."

She stood up.

"Oh! dear, what troublesome creatures men are," she said, with an affectation of laughter.

"Well, Mr. Blake, please get Mrs. Johnson to forgive me for running away like this. It isn't a very busy time just now, and tell her I'll be back for the evening."

She ended with a touch of defiance.

"Are you going?" said Runciman. His eyes followed her to the door; as she passed through, he turned for a second. For a mere flash of time the sort of breathless, furious stillness which had suppressed both voice and manner till now was shivered into tempest.

"As for you, you scoundrel!" he cried—yet he could not make it a cry, his voice was choked—"as for you, so sure as there is—"

He did not finish; it seemed he was afraid of letting out the treasures of his wrath lest he should be interfered with before his soul could be satisfied. He turned from Blake as abruptly as he had turned upon him, and followed Mattie towards the cloak-room.

Some instinct told her that it would be better to make haste; she came out almost as he reached the door, having merely waited to

put on her hat. A cab was outside; he called it and got in after her. They drove off; he had laid hold of her arm, and sat silent, grasping it. After a minute or two she began to fidget.

"Leave go, Jesse," she said, pettishly. "I'm cold; I want to put on my ulster. What do you want holding me like that? You don't think I'm going to run away?" she ended, with the same uncertain sound of laughter as before.

He answered her only by a look. She made no attempt to free herself; muttering something inaudible, she pulled the wrap round her with her free hand as best she could, and then leaned back and pretended to be resting, with closed eyes. They crossed the veld without another word; at the door of their own house he released her perforce. Once inside he flung open the door of the nearest room.

"Go in there!" he said.

"I sha'n't!" said Mattie, defiant now through sheer fright. "I'm going to the kitchen to see about the fire. I'm cold and tired, and I want some tea."

"Do you hear me?" he said; and now his voice came out like a cry.

"The whole street could do that," she muttered, with some exaggeration, "so I suppose I can." She marched in, however, flung herself into a chair, and began pulling off her gloves with an injured expression.

He followed her, closing the door behind him; she was sensible of a certain relief in finding that he did not lock it. He came and stood over her. "And now," he said, and his voice so trembled with rage that she could scarcely follow him—"and now tell me what you mean by—by the way— How dare you? how *dare* you let any man— Oh! I shall go mad!"

With a sudden cry of absolutely inarticulate fury, he positively shook her as she sat—shook her fiercely once and again. Mattie burst into tears of mingled fright and anger.

"I wasn't doing any harm," she sobbed. "You are very wicked and horrid to treat me like this."

"Harm!" he cried, stepping back suddenly, with a movement that was more like flinging her off than releasing her. "Do you suppose that if I thought you had been doing what you call harm you would be alive now to talk about it?"

He paused, as it were breathless; Mattie sobbed on. She did not exactly believe him; she was too well accustomed to the violent ex-

aggravations of his language whenever he was moved in any way. But she had never seen him in this state before, and felt strangely helpless to manage it; moreover, she had gone through a great deal that day in many ways, and what with that and the fright and violence of the present scene, she began to feel thoroughly ill and upset. But if she had had any answer ready she could scarcely have delivered it; it was but an instant before he broke out with redoubled fury.

"Ah, harm! And how long was it to have been before that, anyhow? What was there that he asked just now that you thought to refuse him? Your flowers, your hair, your hand— Oh!"

And once more he had no language but a cry. But now a sudden shock at once of indignation and a more serious alarm than she had yet felt checked Mattie's tears for a moment, and gave her words.

"You were listening!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"Yes," he said, too much concentrated in wrath even for defiance.

"Then you ought to be ashamed to stand there and tell me so! You ought to—"

"Shame!" he retorted, furiously. "It is fine for you to talk to me of shame! Where is your own? Why aren't you down on your knees to ask my pardon, if any way I might forgive you? How do you only dare to hold up your head before me any more? Do you understand that I saw—how that man sat by, looked at you, touched you—that I heard—"

And then, without a word, a look of warning, except the sudden leap of a more animal devil into the blazing anger of his eyes, he seemed to spring upon her; gathered her up to him in an embrace which was a mere gratifying of hate, not love; kissed her with hot, hungry, devouring kisses—among her hair, upon her eyes, her lips, her hands, her neck—till she was blinded and burning and dizzy with his violence.

"There, and there, and there!" he panted. "And for all you ever gave him you shall give me double, and treble, and an hundred-fold, and refuse me if you dare, and I wish mine were fire that they might burn out the stain of his—yes, even if it were to the bone—and make you over again for me!"

She sobbed and shrank, and hid her face, as under an insult which she had neither the power to avert nor the spirit—perhaps, even the right—to resent.

He changed again; releasing her as suddenly as he had seized her, he stepped back a pace; he stood, as it were, stooping together, and voice, eyes, bearing were really those of the elementary savage.

"Do you know," he cried, "that you belong to *me*?"

He put both his hands on her shoulders, pressing down upon her as though he would impose his words upon her by main force. He brought his face down upon a level with hers, very close and near; she glanced, then turned away her head and eyes with an ever-growing terror, for indeed it was not good to see.

"You are mine," he repeated through his set teeth. "Everything you have is mine. Every hair of your head belongs to me, and every touch of your hand. You have no right to look, or smile, or speak except for me. You have no more right over yourself any more at all; you are all mine, for anything I choose."

She wept like a creature in the last despair.

"Give me your hand!" he cried, and she gave it. It lay in his trembling—with how different a tremor from that with which it yielded itself to another clasp! He pointed down at the wedding-ring which shone on it alone. "Do you see that?" he said. "Do you know what it means? Let me ever know you dare to forget it again!"

With a sort of wild animal fury he crushed up the little hand within his, pressing, grinding the fingers together with a force more than all his own with rage, till Mattie screamed aloud with pain and terror.

"Let me go!" she cried, struggling and sobbing in a sort of frenzy of despair and fear. "Let me go! You horrid, horrid—Oh! I hate you; I hate you! I'll not stay with you any more; I won't. You are nothing in the world but a savage—not one bit different from your dear natives outside! You don't know how to treat a woman properly. They had no right to give a white girl to a man like you!"

She pushed him from her with hysterical strength, and he stood staring at her; a sort of shiver ran through him. For one briefest instant it seemed as though the inferior nature, which just then was certainly predominant, might stand cowed. The next, as if the words had rather been the last blow to such feeble barriers of tradition as still stemmed the flood of savagery, he threw up his arms with a look, a cry, which froze her helpless passion into speechless, motionless terror.

"So much the worse for you!" he shouted. "So much the worse for you!"

He came a step nearer; she would have fled now, but her limbs refused their office. She stood grasping the edge of the table,

unable to avert her eyes, to cry out, to think—to do anything but fear.

“You won’t stay with me, won’t you? We’ll see about that!”

A kitchen knife lay among the litter on the table; he snatched it up from within an inch of her fingers, but she never moved the stony terror of her eyes from the face which he kept turned on hers.

“Now I shall kill you,” he said, breathlessly; “I shall kill you with my own hands. If you won’t stay with me living, you shall stay with me dead!”

If she had screamed, protested, struggled, he probably would have done it. She did nothing of all this. Before the blow could fall she had broken together, as it were, just where she stood. She lay at his feet as helpless, as unresisting as in death he would have had her. He stood a moment in the position in which the suspended blow had left him. Then with a gesture of horror great unto dumbness, he flung away the knife and rushed out of the room and out of the house.

The sunshine of the day that had begun so gayly for her had touched the poor, dishevelled waves of Mattie’s hair when she first fell. The ray crawled farther, slowly, a narrow, gliding, golden bar, along the tumbled, disordered folds of the once dainty rose-colored gown, slipped down to her feet, then slid off her altogether; and it was not till then that Mattie stirred a little. Presently she half raised herself from the floor, only to sink together again as helpless as before. She wondered, confusedly, if she should die there all alone, and a few weak tears came into her eyes at the thought.

Ten minutes later Christiana, coming back from a surreptitious outing, saw her so through the open parlor door. With much dismay, and much questioning and ejaculation, she helped her into her own room and into bed, Mattie saying no word either of direction or explanation, only sobbing faintly from time to time, with little shivering sobs. But when the girl, having done all she could and very much frightened, proposed to go for more experienced help, urging that missis might die, Mattie spoke at last.

“Yes, you may go—I don’t want to die,” she wailed; “I’m not fit to die. But if,” she went on, bursting suddenly into a passion of hysterical sobs which the terrified assistant could do nothing to check—“but if anything should happen—if anything has happened—I sha’n’t be sorry; I shall be glad!”

CHAPTER XXIII

It was scarcely his good genius which seemed just now to stand always between Jesse Runciman and all cognizance of his failures and misdeeds in any quarter whence help might have come to him. This time, at least, it might have seemed that enough scandal would have been got up to have come to the ears of his superiors in Cape Town. But it was not so, and this, though the culprit himself at first made no effort to conceal his conduct.

When, at the end of three or four hours, he came back in his right mind and ashamed beyond all power of expression—almost too utterly absorbed in shame even to remember that he had considerable cause for alarm, only anxious to be allowed to humble himself in the dust—he had been met almost on the threshold by the doctor, with the information that Mattie was most seriously ill, that her life depended upon absolute quiet, and that he could not be allowed to see her on any conditions whatever. The doctor had given his sentence as considerately as possible, thinking that he was breaking news for which his hearer could have had no preparation; but the agony of entreaty, remonstrance, and remorse into which Jesse fell at once, as he almost fought to get past by main force, was enough to convey an explanation which Mattie had been in no condition to give, even if she had wished to do so. He cut it short with a peremptory sternness which Jesse was forced to mind, and returned to the patient; but when he came back again at last, prepared to leave the house, he found the young man in such a state, though outwardly quiet, that he forthwith added to his prescriptions one for a long sleeping draught which Jesse, humbled into obedience, took in due course, and which probably saved his reason.

But no one else ever knew the details of the secret history of that afternoon; very few even suspected it in outline. Westoby, indeed, when he had heard, through Dreyer, of Mrs. Runciman's illness, was able to reconstruct the scene almost as well as though he had been present, and began without haste to make preparations for the next move. Sophy de Jongh, hearing also, had suspicions strong

enough to cost her two or three days of secret but severe anguish—days during which a not unnatural resentment could not quell a terror in which the pangs of conscience, accusing her of having spoken under the influence of a vindictiveness which seemed now absolutely diabolical, were now a little reinforced by an unacknowledged dread of a reckoning with Mattie's reproachful ghost, in the event of her death. Nobody, not even Dora Solomon, knew quite how primitive Sophy really was.

But among the few members of their acquaintance at Beaconsfield, Mattie was generally credited with having brought her calamities upon herself by her reckless worldliness and pursuit of pleasure at all costs.

"Just what might have been expected, and serve her right! Gallivanting about from morning to night; in and out of Kimberley two or three times a day; always able for that sort of thing, though she was too done up to come and help at Mrs. Burgess' tea-meeting, and too busy to be a little civil to people that might look for something better than such airs in a chit like that. Who's she, pray, that Beaconsfield's not good enough for her? Pity her! it's him that ought to be pitied—a great affliction for a godly young man to have a wife like that."

But when Mattie came to an understanding of the verdict she accepted it without protest or appeal, feeling, probably, that though a discovery of the truth might damage Jesse's reputation, it could scarcely improve her own.

Yet though it seemed that he was to be punished otherwise than by a merely negative loss, which—except for the shame to himself involved in the circumstances—it is to be feared he did not greatly feel, though he was not even reprimanded, except by his own conscience, still Jesse was really scarcely less miserable than he deserved to be. It was severe penance, and of a kind to which he was little accustomed, to be obliged to keep his penitence to himself: not to be allowed even to ask forgiveness; but it did him good. The discipline at least was so far effectual that when, after nearly a week, he was permitted, under strict cautions, to see his wife again, the interview, though painful, was quiet enough.

Mattie, wrapped in a thick shawl, was sitting up in a big Madeira chair full of cushions. She looked very small and pale, and was herself more subdued than was to be accounted for by physical weakness, for indeed she was gaining strength rapidly. But she understood that, for a few hours at least, she had been within an appre-

ciable distance of death, and her own conscience had not prophesied such smooth things to her but that she was still decidedly serious and full of good resolutions in view of her escape. Somehow she scarcely realized his actual attack upon her as having been an element in her peril; she supposed now that he had only wanted to frighten her. Some people did such things, of course, and their doings got into newspapers; but it seemed impossible to grotesqueness that it might really have happened to her.

Jesse stood a little way off, looking at her till the tears interposed between him and all sight of her; then he came and knelt down by her chair, and hid his face upon the arm.

"Will you be able to forgive me some day?—ever?" he said.

"I'm not angry," she said, with a little sigh. "But, oh! Jesse," she added, piteously, "I thought I was going to die."

"And then I should have been a murderer. You may say it—say what you please of me; nothing can be worse than I think of myself, nothing worse than I deserve."

"There is no use in talking that way, for either of us," she said, wearily. She hesitated a moment; then, turning away her head a little: "I—I wasn't good myself. But it is ever so true," she added, with more energy; "and if you had asked me when I thought I was dying, I should have said the same—I never meant any real harm; I never did."

He had thought that the dead themselves could not be more incapable of passion than he would be, on that subject, for evermore; yet this first reference was enough to send a pang through him. It was not anger any more—he had really exhausted every possibility of wrath—but something at once cowering and troublous: a fear and a tormenting. He put up his hand with a gesture of deprecation.

"If you have forgiven me—" he began; and there he paused. The terms of endearment which rose so naturally to his lips, tender expletives taking off the edge of every remonstrance, the language of caress, more expressive than speech; these he did not dare to use. She said she had forgiven; but there had been nothing in her manner which could embolden him to be on those terms again so soon. "If you have forgiven me," he resumed, with that bald sobriety which meant much bitterness to him, "never talk about all that any more, will you?"

"I'm sure I don't want to," said Mattie, with truth. "We never need."

Then there was silence; he knelt on a little longer, and she sat,

she showed no impatience, neither any compassion; she had no kiss, no touch of absolution for him; and he dared not ask it. Yet she had said truly that she was not angry; she had met his confession half-way with her own. They had both done their duty—it had been no pleasanter than they deserved, but it had been done. Now why would he not go? It would be so much better; yet it would have been against her still fresh resolutions to suggest this. Presently he did rise of his own accord.

"I had better not stay any longer," he said, wistfully; "I shall be tiring you."

Of course he had hoped she would have contradicted him; but she did not, though his suggestion did not represent the actual fact. So far as physical fatigue went, she could have borne much more.

He got just as far as the door; there he stood and fidgeted with the handle a little, and then, as if almost in defiance of his will, he suddenly came half-way back again.

"And—and, Mattie, you didn't really mean what you said—that afternoon?"

A faint color came into her cheeks. She had so hoped that he would be able to refrain from saying this. It is true she had rather hoped than expected it.

"What, of all the things I may have said? There is no use in raking them all up, one by one, is there?" she answered, a little fretfully; and he could not tell whether, or how far, it was an evasion. "I dare say we both said a good deal more than we meant that time; one does when one is in a temper, doesn't one? The best thing we can do now is to forget it all."

If only through all the days that were to come he might hope ever to forget! Words that he had at one time thought would be the last he might ever hear her speak. O Heaven, what last words for a life's memories! He could neither leave the subject nor openly approach it; how could he? Such things are not to be said in cold blood.

"You—you won't go away, will you?" he said, venturing on the more practical portion of his trouble, which yet was so much the smaller. "Don't do that. I don't deserve that you should trust yourself to me any more, but don't do that. I am punished as much as I can bear."

And indeed to be allowed to be with her, even on sufferance, seemed, after the days of his deprivation, a thing to be thankful for: *her absence* a thing too terrible to be endured.

Mattie opened her eyes a little. In good truth she had almost forgotten that particular clause of her fatal speech. It had been a mere hysterical utterance of the despair of the moment; the thought was at once too unpractical—for where in the wide world should she go?—and too utterly alien from all her traditions to have lingered in her memory. For a wife to leave her husband, under any circumstances! Even the somewhat airy morality with which she had become theoretically familiarized since her arrival in South Africa had not prepared her to make such a practical application of it in her own case.

She paused on her answer for a moment in sheer surprise; he took it for hesitation.

"Have patience with me," he pleaded, with an all too abject passion; "you shall never regret it. I'll watch from day to day, and from hour to hour, for any least little sign you will give me of what I can do to make up to you—to make you forget, if you can. You shall only have to speak to have any wish of your heart; you sha'n't have to speak, because I shall know it before you ask, and if I have to get it at the price of my heart's blood, you shall have it. And some day," he went on, anxiously, piteously, "some day you will love me a little again—because, oh! it must be that you loved me *once*; that you didn't always feel—I must have known— And you couldn't hold out always against even a dog that should serve for you as I will."

She looked at him—his craving eyes, his pleading hands—and a fear began to dawn in her face, mingled with a repugnance which her best efforts could not altogether subdue. She had never been comfortable under the manifestations of his passion—now that she had discovered what the ultimate expression of that passion could be, it simply revolted her.

"Oh, Jesse, try and be quiet!" she exclaimed, almost pathetically.

His eyes fell; he bent his head as under a rebuke too just to be resented.

"You needn't be afraid," he said, humbly; "I'm not going to touch you. I know how I must have made you feel about that. I know I don't deserve even to be allowed to kiss your feet. But I'll have such patience; I'll be thankful for so little—only don't take away my last little hope. Only let me have the chance."

"Very well," she said, wearily, willing to make any verbal concession if so she might get rid of him. In the same hope she closed her eyes and let her head sink back among the cushions. "It's all right," she murmured; "I'm not going."

She had prepared herself for an outburst of gratitude as fatiguing as his entreaties, but his "Thank you" came quite quietly on a sigh, and when she opened her eyes a minute later she was alone.

He was not really much less unhappy than he had been before. In fact, his penitence was scarcely more satisfactory than his passion, of which, indeed, it was little more than a new development. Against her only had he sinned—even as he had had no feeling about her misdoings save that of the wrong done to himself. And for her, should there be no other way, he was only too well prepared to sin again after some different fashion. Yet it surprised him that now, after having delivered his soul of its burden of confession and repentance, he did not even feel less alienated from all real desire for good, less disinclined both for his ministerial work and for the private exercises of his religion, than he had been conscious of feeling during all these days of remorseful suspense—days in which he had scarcely prayed, even for her life, save in passionate apostrophes to herself. The time indeed had come when his two lives could no longer exist side by side; he had not yet recognized this, and still tried to rouse into feeling, by means of external acts, the spiritual side of his nature, of whose disquieting torpor he was driven to give himself any explanation rather than the true one.

So now, on leaving Mattie, he sat down, though with a distaste such as he never remembered to have experienced before, to prepare for that evening's work at the location. He had not been there for the last ten days. During the time of Mattie's illness a brother minister of some other denomination had compassionately offered to take that part of his work for him; he had done so twice, but now there was no longer any reasonable excuse for trespassing on his kindness. As he sat down to his work, Jesse would have given much to find one. To prepare at all, in any but the vaguest fashion, was, to tell the truth, a novelty to him; his words, like his feelings, had been wont to come only too freely on such occasions; if they wanted something in coherence they lacked nothing of fluency or fervor. In itself this sudden carefulness was a thing to be commended rather than otherwise; but it was significant that it should have become necessary: that he felt he dared no longer trust to the inspiration of the circumstances and surroundings. They had no inspiration for him any more. He finished his task in a heaviness of spirit for which he strove in vain to account; and at the usual hour started for the location.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN the stars in their courses that night informed him that it was about eight o'clock, Westoby rose up from where he had been lying for some half-hour past, under a mimosa-bush on the veld, not far from the track along which Jesse Runciman would pass on his way back from the location. In spite of the stars the night was dark, with the darkness which is only fully realized in the open country. But some twenty years spent principally out-of-doors had given Westoby something of the powers of vision of the wild animal or the savage; unless it were for reasons quite unconnected with his own facilities of sight and motion, it mattered little to him whether a night were light or dark. It was cold, too, very cold; a thin, keen wind, subtle as the very vapor of ice, swept fitfully across the plain; but he was as indifferent to cold as he was to darkness. Still, no doubt, it was not the way in which he would, by choice, have spent his evenings, and this was the second during the present week that he had so spent.

He sat up, put out the pipe with which he had been beguiling his watch, and fixed his eyes on the direction where the track was rather than where it could be seen. In a few minutes, a darker blackness upon the blackness of the night, some one came in sight, walking slowly. Indeed, Runciman was feeling little in haste to get anywhere: there was nothing that could be called a home-coming any more for him. Westoby, strolling down in a slanting direction towards the track, struck it just a few yards beyond the point to which the younger man had come; then he turned and walked to meet him.

"Oh! is it you?" he said, with sufficiently well-feigned surprise. "I was wondering whether it could be, as I heard that the missus had been sick; but I hope, as you're able to come out, she's getting round again."

Jesse, walking with his eyes on the ground, absorbed in every variety of miserable thought, had not noticed Westoby's approach; now it seemed to him that the last point of his endurance had been reached.

"You villain!" he broke out, with a sort of impotent fury. "If she had died, I—I would have killed you! It would have been you that murdered her more than me. Why did you ever tell me anything at all?"

Westoby shrugged his shoulders; he had been entirely prepared for this opening.

"Go ahead!" he said. "Have it out, by all means. It don't hurt me. You might, perhaps, remember that if you had taken *my* advice you wouldn't have gone in, and would have saved a row and making a fool of yourself generally—because, I suppose, that's the English of it all?"

His tone was a question, and though he had little need of the answer, he seemed to pause for it. But Jesse had none. It was as impossible to deny that Westoby's exculpation was true in the letter, as it was to doubt that it was false in the spirit. For the rest it was not likely he was going to make confession to this man. So, at least, he thought; but he did not quite know this man yet.

"Of course," said Westoby, as if answering himself, or the silence. He had turned again, and was now walking slowly beside Runciman. "You had a row, and likely there was some pretty plain speaking?"

Through the darkness he could yet see Runciman wince, with the instinctive movement of one touched on an open wound.

"So?" he thought; "*her* speaking must have been very plain. I wonder what she said. Maybe you didn't even stop at that?" he continued aloud, still with the same tone of questioning suggestion, the same pause for a reply.

This time it came in the shape of a passionate fragment of protest which was half a sob.

"Well, it was natural enough, I suppose. But," he shook his head almost as it were regretfully, "it was d—d foolish; likely you see that yourself, by now. Ay; I reckon you'll be in a pretty considerable fix."

Jesse stopped in his walk with a movement of desperation.

"Will you go on and leave me?" he exclaimed, passionately. "I never want to speak to you, or hear you speak again. I wish the day was blotted out that ever I set eyes on you."

Once more Westoby shrugged his shoulders.

"See here," he said, with a not unsympathetic forbearance, "you're a bit riled with yourself—that's as it's bound to be; and I suppose it's only to be expected that you should let some of it off on me. Well! I know what that feels like—maybe I've tried it myself—and

I ain't the man to take offence at a little blackguarding from a chap in the kind of quandary you are in."

Jesse made no answer; but neither did he make any more effort, by remonstrance or by turning aside, to free himself from his companion. The one was useless in the face of Westoby's attitude of injured but cheerfully forgiving innocence; he became aware, almost with bewilderment, that he had not one tangible cause of complaint against him. Twice only had they spoken together on this subject in the course of two months; in each case it had been Jesse himself who introduced it. He grew confused; this colossally looming demon of his mental impressions seemed to be shrinking all at once to very commonplace and human proportions. It was the genie's bottle trick—his collapsing effect over again; but the advantage was not on the side of the weaker party—unhappily here the subtler brain was united with, not severed from, the superiority of strength. He was silent; when Westoby, as if unconsciously, began once more to walk slowly onwards, he instinctively moved on too. In fact, he had hardly heart or spirit left for any aggressive, independent action.

"Ay!" continued Westoby, thoughtfully, "I know just how you'll be feeling, all round."

He spoke the truth. His best friends, any more than his worst enemies, would scarcely have given Westoby credit for being a sympathetic person; and in the true sense of the word he certainly was not. Sympathy of heart he had none. But he had that gift of intellectual sympathy—sympathy of the imagination—which is one mark of the ruler of men. He could so well understand, even where he never had felt nor ever would feel, that he had no need for the dangerous affectation of feeling. Most people in this matter take feeling for granted where they find understanding.

"And yet there's a way out," he continued. As he talked, he was turning imperceptibly more and more aside from the track, in a direction away from the township. "I wonder if you have any notion of it?"

"There isn't any way," retorted Jesse, bitterly. "The only way would be to leave off caring, and I should have to die to do that."

"Well," said Westoby, approvingly, "if you could make her fancy that, it might answer—they all go by contraries. But I doubt you couldn't carry it through."

Jesse only made a gesture of mingled impatience and despair.

They had come to one of the numerous undulations in the down-like veld; with the same apparently absent-minded, mechanical ac-

tion as he had used in reaching it, Westoby now sat down on the slope of the hollow, talking all the while; the other followed his example, with a more genuine unconsciousness of what he was about.

"You'll have to ride with a light hand for a time," said Westoby.

"You must see by now how little is ever to be got by bullying."

"I never did," said Jesse, with a feeble indignation. "That once I was beside myself; who could have helped it? But she never had to complain before."

"Maybe not; but we've got to think how things stand now—not how they might have stood if you hadn't been— Well! you won't want any one to be telling you what. To be sure, you were handicapped from the first."

Jesse turned and flung himself, face downwards, on the bare ground.

"It was cruel, wicked!" he broke out. "What had I ever done to deserve all this? I never had done anything; God knows I never had. Yes; I *have* cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence! I will say it, because it is true. I do well to be angry. Nobody ever started meaning better than I did; and God knows where I have got to now—I don't; and all through some one that hates me—that must hate me—that I'm a horror to; how can it be anything else when she thinks I'm no better than—than men I see her shrink from, in all her soul and body, times and times every day? And it's true; I knew it that afternoon—I know now what all sorts of things meant, that I never saw that way before; but was it any fault of mine? What hand have I had in it all, from first to last? Did I ever ask even to be married any more than I asked to be born? It was cruel, cruel to make—people like me."

"It does seem rather hard lines," said Westoby, assentingly; and perhaps in the abstract he really thought it was. His own responsibilities in that way did not trouble him at all; for never on any point did he allow even the most admirable theory to come into competition for a moment, either with the exigencies or the pleasures of practical life. If he had ever denied himself a desire of any kind (and he very frequently did and had done so), it was out of no respect for abstract considerations, however beautiful.

There were a few moments of silence. Westoby sat, absently crumbling up small lumps of the dry soil beside him, letting it dribble through his fingers. Jesse remained as before, revolving bitterness of which all his words could give but a faint impression. Now that this particular difficulty had, for the first time, been really forced upon his notice, he exaggerated it as he did everything; ex-

aggrating Mattie's feelings even more than his own. The mere resumption of their ordinary habits of life was certain soon to modify, if it could not entirely dispel, this trouble; the probability was that a few weeks hence they would have settled down again into much the same sort of existence as in the first days of their life at Beaconsfield, before the shadow of Gerald Blake had fallen upon either of them. Him Mattie sincerely intended to give up, and in other respects she might be trusted even to make considerable exertions to replace the situation on a tolerable footing. Since live together they must, it was but the plainest common-sense to try to do so as little uncomfortably as might be.

Westoby was quite aware of this, but all that concerned him was to take advantage of the state at once of defiance and of abject passion, in which he found Runciman that night; what the young man might feel a week hence was of little importance. Once he stood committed, he was in Westoby's power, and might repent in what agonies he pleased; the Baas could very well promise himself that nothing practical should come of his repentance.

Presently Westoby turned his head a little.

"I wonder now," he said, slowly, "what you might be proposing to do?"

Jesse sat up suddenly, facing him almost fiercely.

"I don't care what I do!" he said, with a sort of sullen defiance. "I will bring her back to me somehow, make her forget. If loving won't get her love, I'll buy it; I'll slave for it—there sha'n't be a lady in the land that shall have every fancy gratified like she shall. I told her so, just now."

"So?" said Westoby, and a little laughter crept into his voice, almost in his own despite. "Upon my word, you have notions of a sort, after all; you're on the right track at last, anyhow. You told her so? You'll soon find out it wasn't for nothing, so far as the fancies go; she'll take you at your word—take mine for it. You'll find it a bit expensive, though—more expensive than you think for. How do you make out to do it on your salary?"

Jesse was silent; in fact, it had been but the previous afternoon that an inspection of his affairs, such as he was in the habit of making about quarter-day, had revealed to his rather startled mind how much of his newly-drawn stipend would have to go in paying back bills.

"And, mind you, you'll have to keep your word—or she may find some one who'll keep it for you, and get your wages, too. You know best how much start he may have already."

Nobody knew better than Westoby—who had that day seen the closed doors of the Linone River Company's offices, who knew to within a few pounds the desperate condition of Gerald Blake's finances—what an impossible lie this insinuation contained. But it was one which his hearer was in every way incapable of detecting, and just put the finishing touch, which was all that was wanted of it. With a movement of a fury which must wreak itself on some tangible object, Jesse suddenly tore up one of the loose-rooted spiky shrublets beside him; tearing it, as it were, limb from limb.

"If she asks for all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and if I have to sell my soul to get them, she shall have them!" he exclaimed, with a passion which was quiet through sheer breathlessness. "And when God asks me: 'What is this that thou hast done?' I shall say: 'This is what the woman whom Thou gavest to be with me has brought me to.'" He paused; Westoby knew better than to take any notice of the extravagant form of a protest of which he shrewdly suspected the speaker himself was half frightened already. Probably it added just a little to his contempt for the man whose fundamental weakness was in no way more unmistakably betrayed than in the useless vehemence of his expressions.

"Well," he said, after a moment, and he made his tone studiously matter-of-fact and business-like; "you can't have been on the Fields even so long as three months, without knowing the quickest and easiest way of making your pile here. If you're willing to take it I'm willing to put you into the way of it so as there ain't many as could or would do. But, of course, I'm not going to do it for nothing; I'm not telling you so—why should I?—of course, I know that cock wouldn't fight. If I help you, it's that you may help me; you'll have to work for me and under me, but I can promise to make it worth your while. You know what I mean; you may take it or leave it. Yes, or no?"

The space of hesitation was scarcely perceptible; some there probably was, but the young man was now at once too reckless in spirit and too much heated in his imagination to be capable of practical reflection. If any fault was to be found with the proposal, it seemed rather just then that illicit diamond-buying was too material and common-place a transgression quite to come up to the demands of the situation.

He flung the wrecked dismembered fragments of the plant he

had torn up far off into the veld with a gesture as if he flung away all scruples, all attempt at further resistance, with it.

"Yes, then," he replied, "I'll do anything; I said so."

He spoke with a sort of doggedness which Westoby never for a moment mistook for strength of purpose. So far from it that, for a moment, a perfect rage of impatience came over him; he could have found it in his heart to get up and walk away, to break off the whole transaction irrevocably then and there, so intense was his realization of the burden and weariness of the task which he was about to undertake. But he restrained himself.

"I reckon, then," he said, as before, "that we understand each other. I give you so much per carat commission on all the stuff you buy for me—we can settle the exact terms another day. I'm quite ready to do the straight thing by you; no one has ever had to find fault with me on that score. So much for my part. For you—you must work only under my orders; buy from nobody except such parties as I bid you, not if they should offer you a second Koh-i-noor, not even if you want to buy on your own account. Mind that; it's for your own good as much as mine; you'd be trapped before you knew where you were, else. You needn't be afraid we sha'n't do enough business to make it pay; I'll back my connection in niggers against any in the four Camps. I've been the best part of twenty years getting it together, and it's a pity if I don't get some good out of it at last. It's large, and—what's a deal more to the purpose—it's safe; and, whatever I might be, *you'll* never be safe for a minute working outside it. That is the very first thing of all. Do you understand?"

And now the voice was the voice of the master, such as Westoby knew how to make it.

"Yes," said Jesse.

"Well, then, what is your next night for going to the location?"

"Thursday."

He was speaking now with a sullenness which was more than half fright. He had not, indeed, so soon arrived at the point of actually wishing to back out of his agreement; he had arrived at a dim perception of the appalling difficulty he would find in doing so, if he did wish it. It was just this that Westoby was most anxious to impress upon him, for, so far as he was concerned, the next forty-eight hours would be the most dangerous of the situation—the hours in which Runciman would know more than was good for any outsider, and yet would not have compromised himself beyond hope of re-

turn. Violence, in Jesse's present condition, would have been useless; he was, for the time, armed against terror by sheer desperation. Westoby could only trust to the paralyzing powers of the mere assumption of an irresistible will. It seemed likely to be effectual.

He sat silent, considering a little, after Runciman's last answer. Then he said:

"Thursday, at the same hour?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think I had better have another talk with you before then; I shall want time to arrange things. Let's see—you go to Dreyer's place sometimes, don't you?"

"Oh yes; I go there," said Jesse, bitterly enough. The little laugh with which he said it would have been tears in a less exceptional mood. Now the revelation seemed quite of a piece with all the rest of the injustice, the merciless irony of Heaven.

It was not much of a revelation to him, after all. The days were long past in which even Jesse could persuade himself that Dreyer was ever likely to be a satisfactory convert; yet he had kept up with him, partly because the canteen-keeper's bearing towards himself was, on the whole, flattering; partly because, after the flourish of trumpets there had been in certain circles over the event, he was unwilling to own publicly that he had altogether failed. So he had continued his visits at intervals, gave good advice, with an ever-diminishing faith in its efficacy, and scarcely troubled Dreyer to reply in terms in the sincerity of which he had no more faith at all, even though the canteen-keeper had made some real sacrifice of his natural habits and manners, with a view to keeping up the character before the public. It is true, he would probably have resumed these openly long since, but Westoby was inexorable now in obliging him to preserve appearances as far as possible.

"All right," said Westoby; "then be there at five o'clock on Thursday afternoon; you will find me. Most likely you won't see much of me after that. Perhaps you may guess I'm not thought to be very good company; and as I reckon nobody could be made to think there was any chance of your having converted *me*, it's best they shouldn't see us on terms at all. Above all, never you come to my place, whatever happens. If it should chance that you must see me, or I you, we must manage it some other way. But if you only stick to orders, it ought to be all plain sailing enough."

He rose up from his place.

"I'll be off now," he said. "You stay here a bit—ten minutes, say—and then go home. You remember and understand?"

"Yes," said Jesse, but it was as in a dream.

"Good-night, then," said Westoby, and strolled away across the veld towards Kimberley. In a moment the darkness had swallowed him.

Jesse Runciman sat on obediently; in the growing confusion of his mind obedience seemed the one anchor left. Deep down in his soul was a sort of relief—the reverse side of a great suspense—to feel that so far it was an innocent obedience. He tried to benumb his every power of thought and feeling, and nature itself helped him, numbing both with the exhaustion of a great reaction. The chill of this exhaustion added its own insidious deathliness to that of the cold without; he shivered now, as he sat, yet felt suddenly too weary even to wish to move before he need.

The silence that seemed natural to the hour and place was rent continually by the clamorous barking, now near, now far, challenging, responsive, of innumerable dogs, by a kind of tom-tom performance on empty paraffin tins, proceeding with maddening monotony from the location. He did not heed it; his nerves were too much deadened even to be sensible of irritation.

He sat there in a great momentary, vacuous peace; his soft, sad eyes staring blankly before him at the spangled sky. A falling star slid from its place, gleamed, and passed into nothingness. A moment later, with a little vacant sigh, he, too, slowly rose and passed.

CHAPTER XXV

THE golden traces of sunset still lingered in the west, yet the winter afternoon was deepening into its brief, dark dusk, when Jesse Runciman presented himself at the door of Dreyer's canteen, at the appointed hour. He found the canteen-keeper standing, as he might constantly be seen standing, just outside the doorway, leaning against the door-post, smoking. He looked, as usual when unoccupied, faintly bored; but not unpleasantly so; it was merely as though he were contentedly waiting, with something of the languid certainty of expectation expressed in the lines of a piece of wet sea-weed during ebb-tide, for the hour when the flood should once more claim and

revive him. On this occasion his appearance entirely belied his real sentiments; but he was acting under strict orders, which forbade him to show anything of that sense of the exquisite humor of the situation with which he was secretly bubbling over.

When the young minister came to the door, Dreyer took his pipe out of his mouth, and Jesse was conscious that some remark was being addressed to him; but he was, at the moment, as incapable of understanding it as he would have been of originating any. It mattered little, since it was merely intended to give an appearance of ease and naturalness to the meeting; two or three similar ones succeeded, to which Jesse answered "Yes" or "No" at random, and then Dreyer led the way into the canteen.

When, some half-hour later, Runciman came out again, alone, his bearing, his whole expression, had undergone a subtle but very curious change. When he came he had been very pale, and a certain superficial sullenness had made but the thinnest disguise for the fear that was staring with a sort of fascinated fixity out of his scared eyes. Now, as he stood for an instant beneath the lighted lamp above the doorway, he was pale enough still, but the fear seemed to have been driven out for the moment. He looked almost resolute, but with the resolution of absolute despair. He had gone in with still some possibilities of struggle left in him, if it were only for very fear's sake; he came out mastered beyond daring even to listen to the voice of fear, forbidden so much as to look afraid, lest the substance of that dread should, by his very looks, be brought upon him.

Even as he turned from the door of the canteen, that of the room which he had just left was opened from without, and Dreyer came in. He had not been allowed to be present at the interview; it said a good deal for Westoby's influence that even his devouring curiosity had not emboldened him to satisfy himself by listening. He had too little hope of being able to affect unconsciousness afterwards with any degree of success. He did not find Westoby particularly communicative, though seemingly not out of humor; to Dreyer's inquiry as to whether it was all right, he replied,

"Right enough, for this time; and the first is sure to be the worst one."

"How did he take it?"

"As you might fancy. Couldn't do this, and would never do that, and didn't dare the other. I can't be bothered with going through it all again; once a day is about enough of such foolery."

He stood up and stretched himself, as if dismissing a wearisome

if unimportant matter. But Dreyer, who was not wanting in persistence, went on,

"Was he in a very great funk?"

"Quite enough," said Westoby, with a short laugh.

Dreyer fumbled a little over the lock of the chiffonier which he was opening; he kept his face hidden from Westoby, and tried to keep all trace of the feeling to which he had just referred out of his voice, but with very partial success.

"Of course, you know best, Baas," he began, conciliatingly; "but I should have thought it was a bit risky, too, to trust a chap that's given to lose his head at awkward times."

Westoby laughed out with one of his most thunderous peals of laughter. He was altogether more visibly excited just now than he often allowed himself to be. It might have been triumph, but the impression it gave was rather that of a certain ferocity which, though carefully subdued, now and again nearly escaped even his strong control. Now he came up to Dreyer with one of his lounging strides, and by a mere twist of the great hand he laid on the canteen-keeper's shoulder, brought him round, so that the lamp-light fell upon his face. It was a little pale and discomposed.

"So you've got a touch of it too, then?" he laughed. "There, go on with your job," he continued, releasing him, "and make yourself easy. He'll not dare to lose his head, nor back out, nor give trouble of any sort for one good while. You may bet anything you please he's more afraid of *me*, by now, than of all the law and the prophets."

Dreyer, looking a little annoyed and confused, muttered something indistinct.

"Now it'll only depend on you to keep it up; you'll find it's a trump card. Don't be always playing it, of course; but don't let him ever quite lose the feel of me, either. Make as big a bogie of me as you like, in reason. You may tell him any yarns you please about me—as much as you think he'll swallow."

"If I was to keep to true ones," retorted Dreyer, "there'd be some pretty stories still, wouldn't there? Not likely to make a man feel much like kicking."

Westoby laughed again.

"Oh! so long as you understand," he said, "I leave that part of the job to you. It's a bit awkward for me to be my own trumpeter."

Dreyer nodded comprehendingly; he pushed over one of the

tumblers of liquor he had been preparing towards his companion. Westoby tossed it off standing.

"Thank ye," he said, setting down the glass with a crash; "I wanted something to take away the taste of all that shilly-shallying. You look as if you'd be none the worse of it, either," he added, with a touch of malice. "Only, mind you," he said, with sudden earnestness, bringing down his hand on the table to enforce attention, "what's sauce for the goose ain't always sauce for the gander, whatever folks may say, and you'll remember that in this matter."

"I don't know what you mean," said Dreyer, a little sulkily. "If you've any orders to give, give 'em plain; I ain't bound to understand riddles."

"I'll give 'em plain enough," retorted Westoby. "Mind, then, you never lend so much as a finger to making the Reverend Runciman drink."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dreyer, with a touch of genuine surprise. "I hadn't thought of it."

"Maybe not; but, take my word for it, you'll be tempted to do it before all's said and done. You may see him that low as to be ready to hang himself—he won't do that, but you might think it. You may see him in as blue a funk as ever even you were in in your life; never let yourself be tempted to cheer him up or put a little heart into him, as you call it, that way. What's more, don't allow him."

"But if he chooses, how can I prevent him?"

"If you can't, then you must send for me; I'll talk to him," said Westoby, grimly. "What are you wondering about?" he went on, and the latent savageness in his mood seemed to break out all at once; "that I should care so much whether he goes to the devil or no? I don't care—or, rather, the sooner the better; but I'll be hanged if he goes there in any way that's likely to make things unpleasant for me. And I tell you, once let him take to *that*, and he'll be neither to have nor to hold."

He spoke with a sternness which showed the importance which he attached to this point. For a moment he remained standing, silent; then he seemed at once to shake off his seriousness, and to repress an uprising of personal vindictiveness which he had betrayed more than he could have wished in the tone of his last speech. Not in the hours when Jesse Runciman had most thwarted and insulted him, had Westoby hated him with such a fervor of hatred as rose up in him now when the young man was at his mercy. It seemed he

had scarcely known what hatred really meant, till he had begun to taste revenge. He quieted himself, not without a certain effort, and went to the door. There he turned for a moment.

"In two hours from now," he said, "our young gentleman will have settled himself. I would like to hear his discourse to-night; it ought to be what the old ladies call very precious." He was gone, upon the sneer. If he could have had his wish, he might have been at once pleased and disappointed.

When Runciman entered the location that evening, it was with the dream-like abstraction of manner which was the nearest approach he could make to self-control, obtained only by a desperate determination to keep his mind at each successive moment a complete blank, so far as concerned the next. He had no need to think, so far as thought meant planning; his master had supplied him with every detail he could require, whether of speech or action—had even gone so far as to make him rehearse his part till his tongue no longer tripped, till he no longer halted or fumbled in his movements.

He stood at the door of one of the huts; the dark, variously bedizened figures clustered round, coming and going much as the fancy took them: those whose fancy did not turn that way at all jabbered to each other, sparred, or laughed, at a more or less respectful distance. In an open space, not far from where he stood, a fire had been kindled on the ground; squatted round it, three or four naked Kaffirs were engaged in some very primitive cookery. The flame leaped and wavered and sank; in the red glare the night sky took on a more velvety depth of blackness, the far stars whitened. Mysterious, uncertain shadows came and went; they played about the preacher's face, alternating with the fitful glow; had there been any agitation to conceal, this would have concealed it. But there was none: Jesse's face was as inanimate as was his language, which flowed on in conventionally inflected commonplaces of which he could scarcely have believed himself capable.

It was over at last. The little group began to disperse; only one or two, lingering, came up in turn to exchange a few words with him. Among these was a native in a blanket, with a Kaffir switch in his hand, who had been standing on the outskirts of the audience. Moshetsewa, who, at some time during the course of his dealings with civilization, had acquired the suggestive alias of "By-and-By," was an ordinary-looking Kaffir, in whom, of all the amiable traits of the savage character, a physiognomist might perhaps have decided those of laziness and cunning to be predominant. But even of this

amount of expression there was scarcely enough to make him really distinctive. He was of good average size and strength of build ; not one of the blackest of his kind ; his face, now enlivened by a sort of deprecatory grin displaying all his strong, yellowish, animal-looking teeth, was seamed here and there with deeply-furrowed scars, reminiscences of some faction-fight in the Natal location where he had sojourned for a few months, a year or so before.

If Runciman had not known beforehand what was to be the gist of his remarks, perhaps he would scarcely have been able to follow them, as the man spoke in a dialect with which Jesse had but a very slight acquaintance ; they could, in fact, just understand each other, and no more. If any of the inmates of the location took the trouble to notice at all when Runciman followed the man into one of the huts, none thought it remarkable ; he had often done so before, both in cases of sickness and at the request of theological inquirers.

Inside, the hut was quite dark, even when the owner had lighted a small end of candle, that scarcely did more than faintly illuminate a little space of the red earth on which it stood, and the still grinning features of the savage who now squatted beside it. But Jesse knew, by feeling rather than by sight, that they two were alone ; and so far as he dared even think what he felt he did feel glad of it—glad, too, of the darkness which seemed to hide, even from himself, something of his fear and of his shame. Near the spot where Moshetsewa had set down the candle, a sort of lair, of which the component parts were indistinguishable in the dim light, represented his bed. Among, or under, this—Runciman could scarcely see which—he now began to grub with his strong, coarse black fingers ; it was the work of a few moments, then he pivoted round on his heels and held out a hollowed hand in whose palm, mixed with the red soil from which he had just unearthed them, lay some score of rough diamonds, varying in size and shape. He brought his hand into the little circle of yellow light, and, still sitting upon his heels, reached it up towards Runciman, a furtive cunning growing in his eyes, while his features tried to express a modest consciousness of merit, and a confidence that the result of his labors would be properly appreciated.

Jesse bent down to look. Even as he mechanically counted the stones, there came across him the thought of how it might be if, now, at the very last, in the few seconds that remained before the sale was consummated, he should draw back ; how if, braving, once for all, Westoby's threats and insinuations, he should discharge

what once would have seemed such a simple duty; should send one of the men whom he could trust straight off to the police-station, and deliver the culprit over to justice then and there. He thought of this; but it was as, one short year ago, he would have thought of his present position, concerning which, then, had warning voice or vision foreshown it to him, how ready would have been his scornful remonstrance, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?"

As visionary, as impossible, as his present course of action would have seemed to him then, did this idea seem to him now. Westoby's eyes watched him, out of the darkness; Westoby's sneers and brutal bullyings rang in his ears; his arm still ached with one wrenching grip which Westoby had fastened on it to enforce some point of obedience or attention. Westoby had meant that it should. The dream of revolt passed, as it had come, in the few brief moments that he stood bent over that upstretched hand. He stood up again.

"That's not enough stuff for the bargain," he said. "Where's the rest?" In his voice, his manner, was the most piteously ridiculous reminiscence of his master's; he repeated his lesson with the sort of conscientious second-hand appropriateness of inflection of a little child on recitation-day.

The blankest amazement here overspread Moshetsewa's countenance. He protested that, in allowing these stones to change hands for the paltry sum of fifteen pounds, he was taking what not another boy on the Fields would accept; that he had no more; that the Baas might search both his hut and his person, but never another diamond could he produce.

Now, Runciman had not the least idea whether the stones produced were a fair equivalent to the money promised or not. Moshetsewa had guessed this much; and though he knew that not for a moment would Westoby be induced to believe that they were, he cherished a hope, worth trading on under the circumstances, that he might be able to account to him for the deficiency. Perhaps, by dint of hard swearing, it would be possible to persuade his principal that the fault lay with the intermediary; that the gems, handed over by himself in their integrity, had been misappropriated by this scoundrel *en route*. But he had not calculated on Westoby's having made all these mental calculations for him, beforehand, with the greatest exactness, and having instructed his agent accordingly. Therefore, when Runciman, though he had

found the address barely intelligible, still keeping doggedly to his instructions, proceeded to count out before the greedy, glittering eyes about one third of the sum agreed on, Moshetsewa felt that he had mistaken his man—one or both of them.

He whined out a few more remonstrances; but as these produced no effect whatever, he seemed, with regret, perhaps, but without the slightest shame, to resign himself to the inevitable. Throwing off his blanket, he carefully deposited the stones upon it; then, taking up the switch, which he had thrown to one side, he stood up. It was a handsome switch, of long ivory-white horse-hair, mounted in a heavy, elaborately-worked brass and copper-wire handle, ending in a sort of crook. Stooping a little forward, he began to shake it, sharply but carefully, over the blanket. And, as he shook, the thing began to rain diamonds; now glittering a little as the uncut crystal, in falling, chanced to catch the candle-light; more often dropping dark, and no more beautiful than so many tiny pebbles, they fell by ones and twos upon the blanket. The wonder of the thing, perhaps, made the precious shower seem more copious than it really was, for when the contents had been, honestly this time, discharged, only some eight or ten extra stones were lying among the others; but even Runciman's inexperience could see something of the difference in size and quality.

Moshetsewa, with an anxious eye on the agent's countenance, was now whisking and shaking his switch in a frenzied manner, by way of proving its entire emptiness.

"No more," he said, quite pathetically; "no more anywhere. It is true."

Then, as if fearing that Runciman might still be incredulous, he suddenly squatted down again close to the candle.

"Not anywhere," he repeated. "See!"

With the words he opened his mouth, as a human mouth is seldom seen to be opened. He snatched up the candle, and allowed the light to penetrate to the most cavernous recesses.

"Feel, if you like, Baas," he said, and opened it again for a moment.

He set the candle down, and began to run his fingers desperately through the mat of his woolly hair; to shake his head wildly, again offering the test of personal inspection. Then suddenly springing to his feet, he began a series of the most extraordinary antics. He danced, he wriggled, he shook himself, he flung out his arms, his legs, his toes, his fingers; he seemed to throw himself to the

four winds, to do everything except actually turn himself inside out. And all the time he wailed, at intervals, with the accent of genuine sincerity—

“No more anywhere. See! It is true.”

It was horrible, loathsome, inhuman—this naked savage capering and contorting, without shame, without even a perception of degradation. There came upon Jesse, as he beheld, a disgust, a revolt—and yet that was not all, it was not the worst. The worst was some nameless, hideous stirring of fascination; something in him that wanted to laugh—and he knew that the sound would be that strange Kaffir laugh, which is neither to be mistaken nor described; he felt as if another minute might see himself committed to some unthinkable horror of degradation; as if he might fall to dancing too. In fact, between nervousness and shame, and the imitation-born of a sort of defiant impenitence which had seized him now that the thing was done, he was nearly at the end of his powers of endurance. For the moment even Westoby was forgotten.

“Stop that devil’s dancing, will you!” he exclaimed in English, stamping his foot in a passion of nervous irritability, “and let us finish the business.”

His words were unintelligible, but his gestures satisfied Moshetsewa that he was convinced. He stopped, therefore, with perfect composure, seeming rather pleased with himself.

Jesse pretty nearly flung the rest of the money at him; it was not accepted any the less gratefully. Then, taking out of his pocket two or three pieces of lead-foil, he knelt down and began to wrap up the diamonds in them, a dozen or thereabouts in each, re-counting them hastily as he did so, and waving off Moshetsewa, when that gentleman insinuatingly offered his assistance. Westoby had been strong on this point; he knew Moshetsewa’s gifts of legerdemain too well to let him lay a finger on the stones again, once they were out of his possession.

Runciman stood up, put the three little parcels into some of his inner pockets, and went out. The last he saw of Moshetsewa was a grin.

CHAPTER XXVI

RUNCIMAN went out, and for quite a space of time his feeling was one of pure, unmitigated relief. He was so thankful to have done with the sordid, sickening, material rascality of this first part of the business, that he quite forgot to feel afraid.

Then, just as he got into the township, some wretched stray cur, sneaking up, began to snuff and jump upon him with little yelping barks; one or two passers-by turned to look. It was enough. In an instant, for Jesse, the darkness—the saving, sheltering darkness—was shattered into light: a light that laid bare his soul—not to himself, oh! that would have mattered so little—but to all the world. Every one knew what he had been doing, what he bore about him. They were all looking at him, now; when they spoke to one another it was of him. In a moment some man would cry to his neighbor, and the chase would begin. He must run; he must. Ah! no; he must not; this was folly, he was going mad. Of course, they did not know; and, no, he must not run. What had Westoby said? he had warned him of just this trial; with what penalties of instant detection had he not threatened him as the sure consequence of a moment's loss of nerve, of the most rigid control of action, even of expression? And then deep called unto deep of fear as he recalled, in every awful detail, the merciless picture that had been drawn for him of all that detection would mean.

He pulled himself together, and with such an effort as he had scarcely made in his life, actually did master every outward sign of trepidation, except, perhaps, a deadly paleness. Even with the soul of every sense absorbed in fear, blind and deaf and dazed with fear, he contrived to keep a sort of external watchfulness on what was going on around him, lest, haply, some word, some incident, should find him unprepared.

Nothing did happen, however, which perhaps was just as well. He reached home after an interval which mocked all measurement by time; went straight to his little study, locked himself in, and

then sank down on a chair, covered his face with his hands, and was seized at once with a fit of shivering in which the intolerable nervous tension of the last few hours seemed to relax at last. For some minutes he could neither move nor think; only sit there, shaken with this silent, uncontrollable convulsion. Then by degrees Nature, having avenged, righted herself; he drew one deep breath, raised his head, and began to gather strength. He stood up, unlocked the drawer in which he kept his little japanned cash-box, unlocked that too, and put in the parcels of diamonds.

Then he hesitated. Westoby had bidden him put it back in the drawer, asking, with contemptuous impatience, why there should be more danger this night than on any other. But he had not the nerve for this. The drawer, indeed, he shut and locked as usual; the box he could not bring himself to trust out of his sight. He carried it with him into the room which he had occupied since Mattie's illness; there he put it on a chair close to the bed, where he had but to stretch out his hand to feel it safe.

He had prepared himself for a sleepless night; but, perhaps, that would have been less trying than the succession of dreams from which he woke every time in an agony of terror, yet of which he never could quite remember the catastrophe. Between whiles he lay in that sort of helpless half-wakefulness which allows of thought, but not of any control over it; in this state he revolved, over and over again in a weary round, every plan he had ever heard of for the concealment of illicitly purchased diamonds. Over and over, till his brain was weary almost to delirium, he would see himself unscrewing the brass knobs from the head and foot of the bedstead in his own room, filling them with those dreadful little parcels, and then screwing them on again; and in his imagination they never would screw back quite tight—would topple over suspiciously to one side; he saw himself twisting and twisting till his head seemed to turn with the screws. Or else, endlessly, hopelessly, he would be boring out a hollow in the foot of a table—a hollow which somehow silted up again as fast as he scooped it out; if he had accomplished it, and the hateful property had been thrust away into it, then the cork which was to close the opening would not fit; it was too large, and the table would not stand steady, or it was too small, and down slipped the diamonds again and again. Then, when he seemed on the verge of madness with this helpless, waking nightmare, his brain would cloud over imperceptibly and he would doze off again, only to dream and wake as before.

However, towards morning he did fall into a heavy, dreamless sleep; it refreshed him sufficiently to enable him to present a tolerable appearance when he got up. That is to say, he did not look perceptibly worse than he had done for the last ten days. It is true that his looks, since the terrible day of the bazaar, had earned for him the pity, and for Mattie, rather unjustly, the indignation, of all their Beaconsfield acquaintance. Before leaving his room, he put the stones once more in his pockets; the box he restored, unnoticed, to its place. Towards the middle of the forenoon he went out.

He walked along the road towards the cemetery for a short half-mile, then turned aside where a sort of cart-track wound in and out among a clump of *débris* heaps. The track led to a few hovels at the back of the heaps; a wretched group of half-ruinous, unbaked brick tenements and patched-up tin shanties, where an ever-shifting population of tramps, and the lowest class of colored folk, received indifferently the attentions of any minister who chose to look them up, and were gone before next visit. It was a sort of No-Man's-Land. Jesse had been there, on and off, like others; but this morning, though he seemed to be making for this, he did not go so far. A little way beyond the main road he left the track, and made his way among the intricacies of the heaps. Presently he came to a spot where an old washing-machine seemed to have been abandoned on one of the slopes. Here he sat down and waited.

He sat in a perfect solitude. Above him, and all around him, the *débris* heaps rose—a confused tumble of formless mounds, like so many fossilized, livid-gray sandhills, rent, in places, into deep fissures, as if by the shock of an earthquake. Here and there the slender saplings of the tobacco-tree, with its sparsely-set, glaucous-green foliage, were already springing up from the caked dry ground. There was no other verdure. When Jesse looked up, he could see, above the heaps, high up against the sunny sky, the skeleton lines of an aerial tramway at the Bullfontein mine, with the trucks gliding up and down. The mounds made a shelter from the wind, which was clear and cruelly cold; there was a pleasant glow of sunshine over all the bare gray slopes; it was very warm and still; only now and then the rumble of an unseen wagon, or the sharper rattle of a cart, came from the main road; now and then a strident whistle from some engine at the mine. Jesse sat and waited.

Presently, from an opposite direction to that by which he himself had come, he saw Christian Dreyer advancing towards him. In an-

other minute he had come up and seated himself beside the young minister. The situation could not fail to be a little awkward, and Dreyer showed more tact than might have been expected in not prolonging it. After a sufficiently civil greeting, and a general remark on the weather, he said,

"If you have brought the things, Mr. Runciman, we'll just do the job at once, if you don't mind. I'm in a bit of a hurry."

He went over to where the old washing-machine lay, rusty, rotten, and superannuated, and from some recess within or beneath it drew out a pair of diamond scales. Jesse surrendered his parcels. Dreyer unwrapped them carefully, examining the contents with the swift eye of a connoisseur.

"A few real good things," he said; "the rest nothing special. Up to average sample, but not much more. After all the Baas said about that chap, I should have thought he might have done more for us; however, it's not so bad. There are just a few out of the way good."

He proceeded with his weighing in silence, doing the delicate work with the careful quickness of long practice. Not another word was exchanged till the stones, wrapped up as before, had been restored to Jesse's pocket, and the scales to the machine. Then Dreyer, sitting down again, made a rapid calculation in pencil on the back of a dirty envelope.

"It was to be so much per carat, wasn't it?" he asked, looking up for a moment. "The Baas didn't say anything to me about any agreement having been made about quality."

"No; there was none."

Dreyer nodded, resumed his calculations for a moment, and then, taking out a greasy purse, handed over the sum due on commission. For an instant the color rushed furiously into the young man's pale face; then, with a rather too aggressive assumption of indifference, he put the notes into his pocket-book, in the silence which was all the approach to dignity that the situation permitted him. If Dreyer eyed him rather curiously, rather humorously, he did not make any offensive parade of doing so.

"We used to do a good bit of business here at one time," he said, perhaps to cover the pause during Jesse's proceedings, "but now the boys are afraid of it. The chap that thing belonged to," he went on, pointing to the machine, "was in the trade, and one day he was trapped. He got away, but next day they found him again just by the border; he took to the river, but he wasn't much

of a swimmer and he was drowned. Now the niggers say he left a lot of stuff buried somewhere about here, and comes back to look for it. They swear they have seen him digging in broad daylight, and they won't come here any more. But I've never seen anything."

Runciman paid little conscious attention to this anecdote, though it was to have its own power for torment later on, too. He sat sullenly passive, while Dreyer, now getting interested in his subject, rambled on.

"I never did hold much with that burying dodge myself," he said, reflectively. "If it's safe in one way, it's risky in another; if anything happens, it's a hundred to one you never see your stuff again, nor the value of it. Some other chap'll have tumbled on it, or they'll have built over it, or something; maybe you'll never be able to hit on just the place again yourself—the lie of the land changes a deal here, even in five years."

Jesse's nerves had steadied wonderfully, under the influence of Dreyer's presence and cheerfully business-like manner. But when the speaker paused on this allusion, with a half-melancholy shake of the head, it was too much for him. He shivered involuntarily; a sick feeling came over him. Dreyer did not observe the change in his face.

"No, I don't hold with it," he went on, with decision. "'Small profits and quick returns,' as the shops say—that was always my motto. The Baas, now, he takes a fancy at times for doing things on a real big scale; he likes the risk of it, I fancy—seems to amuse him. But I don't care about it myself; though, no doubt, it pays better, too."

It was all too degrading, too horrible; this disgust was almost worse than the fear.

With a sudden movement, the young man rose to his feet. Dreyer misunderstood the feeling that had prompted him.

"Yes, you had better be the first to go," he said, rising also. "You quite understand all the rest, don't you? You'll soon get used to the business," he went on, encouragingly. "You feel a bit sick and funky at first—we all do, bless you! I was just as bad when I started, but it soon goes off. Before long, you'll think no more of it than you would of buying a ticky loaf."

It was really kindly meant. Dreyer had no personal grudge against the young man, and the real spirit of the situation he was *honestly* incapable of understanding; for his moral perceptions were

of the dullest, and of spiritual sense he had not a trace. Therefore, it was out of a real impulse of kindness, moved by the neophyte's pallor and evident agitation, that he sought to speak words of cheer; it was with the same laudable motive that, forgetting for a moment Westoby's injunctions to avoid all unusual familiarity of manner, he put out his hand and grasped Runciman's with a clasp that was half patronage, half good-fellowship—Runciman, to whom he had never yet offered any but the most obtrusively respectful of salutations!

Jesse started as if he had been stung; his fingers, his whole person, seemed to stiffen; the hand that Dreyer released might have been lifeless, so unresponsively it fell. Drawing up his head with something of the old haughtiness, of which he had not yet fully grasped the terrible absurdity, he turned on his heel and went off without a word. He was still so new to it all; he could not so suddenly recognize his true position. How did that fellow dare! Ah, how, indeed? And how could Jesse, as yet, suspect that the days should come when even such sympathy as this would be not ungrateful to him in the awful moral isolation to which he had unknowingly committed himself?

He went home, and finished his preparations as directed. Early in the afternoon he walked into Kimberley with a parcel, which he took to a transport agency—not Westoby's—one of whose wagons was advertised to start next morning. It was addressed to the minister in charge of a mission-station some ten miles from Christiana, to be left till called for at a certain store in that village; and it was described as containing books, and did, indeed, contain books—and other things; for the pierced and riddled pages of the half-dozen Kaffir Testaments were so many little cases for rough diamonds.

It was not a pleasant moment, that in which he surrendered his parcel; nor did he carry it off very well. But the office was full, the clerks were busy, and nobody paid him much attention—just enough to see to his business, certainly not enough to notice his manner. And, in words, he did not dare show any particular anxiety about the matter. When the man who received the parcel banged it down behind the counter among the rest of the goods, Jesse's heart seemed to stand still for a moment, such an awful expectation came over him of seeing the contents scattered on every side in the sight of all beholders. But, of course, nothing happened, and somehow he got himself out of the office.

However, the walk back quieted him considerably; it was some-

thing, it was much, to feel personally free from that horrible intimate risk which he had actually carried about with him for so long. A reaction of comparative security set in—a reaction so strong as to be almost gladness. He slept that night with the sleep of such relief that it might have been the slumber of innocence—so deep it was, and so refreshing.

With the next day he entered upon a period of suspense; how long this lasted he scarcely knew, because, beginning with a mere fidgetiness, it grew by degrees, till, stretched on the rack of his anxiety, time seemed to lengthen out into eternity. Day and night, as the days went on and brought him no news, his imagination tortured him. The catastrophes which overtook Eugene Aram in his attempts to conceal the body of his victim were probable and natural compared with those which Jesse foresaw for his parcel; and in whatever form vengeance visited the transport for its sake, that alone survived the wreck of all things, and in such a way as to get itself traced back surely, unerringly, inevitably, to him as the sender.

He could not have held out much longer, he must have humbled himself to seek encouragement even of Dreyer, when, one morning, an unknown but civilized-looking Kaffir came up to him in the street, and, pulling his shapeless felt hat, said in English, "If you please, Baas, the big Baas tell me to tell you it is all right."

The relief, the final, unutterable relief, was so intense, so awful, even, that the young minister, dropping with a gesture of the rapture of enfranchisement the hand he had passed across his eyes and brow, had uttered a "Thank God!" as instinctive as it was passionate, before he realized what he was saying. The next instant it had flashed across him: What was this thing for which he was returning thanks? What an awful mockery, what a blasphemy was here! A great dread came upon him, of a kind of which, till this moment, he had felt no trace. He could not go farther that morning; he turned and went home, conscious, for the first time, not only of criminality, but of sin.

The stern and irrefutable logic of facts has convinced the most obtuse I. D. B. that his proceedings are illegal; it would require the most persuasive efforts of a master of casuistry in the cause of virtue to persuade even an averagely intelligent one that they are also immoral. Probably it could not be done at any price. To get a fair conception of the general state of feeling as regards this matter, from a moral point of view, one may look back to the early years of the present century—the good old times of the English smuggling

trade; the parallel will be found in many points singularly complete.

But Jesse had not been brought up to average ideas either of law or honesty, nor did his temperament allow of his taking an average line in any such matter. He suffered in proportion. Hitherto sheer, unmitigated dread of the legal consequences of his action had left no room for any other feeling, much less for reflection. Now that this dread was temporarily removed, he had time to realize his moral position. It was a long time since he had done this. A general idea that matters were not particularly satisfactory he had had; but the details in themselves were so trifling that it was easy to refuse to look at them at all.

But this was no longer the day of small things. He could scarcely shut his eyes to the fact that he had been within an inch of murder, and was now, to all intents and purposes, a thief. He did not trouble himself to adjust the exact balance of criminality between the purchaser of stolen property and the actual abstracter. Sophistry of this kind was not one of his failings; he might refuse to look matters in the face at all, but if either conscience or circumstances forced him to do so, he was under less temptation than most men to call things by other than their right names. He cut clear in all his judgments—of himself no less than of others. It was one of the few moral compensations of his temperament.

This, then, was how he stood: with these secrets on his soul he must go about, day by day, persuading, rebuking, exhorting—perhaps for the very things in which he had so glaringly failed himself; must stand up to discourse of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come—and it was certain that none of his hearers would tremble as the preacher would himself; for though he was not really at all penitent, as yet, he was now horribly frightened.

He would have done anything—anything in the world—to get out of his false position, except the only thing that could avail—honest confession to the authorities at Cape Town. This he could not do. Even if he had reached the point at which confession would have been to himself a relief almost exquisite in its intensity (and he was far from this as yet), he still could scarcely have brought himself to it.

The consequences! Supposing, even, that to avoid open scandal he were not actually degraded from the ministry, of course he would be removed; there were places which, though not ostensibly so, were yet, as the initiated knew, practically penal settlements—places where

old-established elders and deacons made, by a sort of tacit understanding with the authorities, the life of an erring or suspected minister a burden to him—places always liable to surprise visits from headquarters, which had to be carried off as an honor instead of an inquisition. And if the minister fared ill, what of the minister's wife? How would Mattie suit herself to such a remove as that?

But probably he would be degraded. They would be so angry with themselves for having been so egregiously deceived in him. What mercy had he to expect at their hands? He would be degraded; would disappear; would be, as it were, blotted out; sent up in disgrace, open and undisguised, to some remote settlement—set, perhaps, to actual manual labor. And Mattie must go with him. What slow, lonely misery of estrangement did this imply! what wearing bitterness of daily, hourly upbraiding! Would she not make it even a reproach to him that he had not killed her outright, rather than drag her, living, to this obscure, dishonored death-in-life?

No; he must go through with it at all costs, smothering his spiritual terrors as best he could, as he had smothered the others of the last few days. They would wear off in time, perhaps; he knew that to hope this was to hope for the consummation of all terror, yet he did look to it as to a little respite from suffering on this side eternity. Why should he suffer in two lives? from the fear as well as from its fulfilment? since the one could not save him from the other.

And while he was in this frame of mind, Mattie got a letter from Sarah Arkwright. A few lines announcing the death of old Mr. Glasse—Sarah had not, after all, been in time to see him again alive—had reached them a day or two before the bazaar. This letter was to say nothing less than that they were leaving Beulah in a few weeks' time, and coming to settle in Kimberley. Mr. Glasse's death had changed many things, Sarah said; Sam had set his heart on this move, and it seemed better in many ways. Except a few tender expressions of pleasure at the thought of being so much nearer to Mattie, that was all the comment or explanation she gave.

It seemed to Jesse that this was the finishing touch. He dreaded her arrival with dread unspeakable. If, in the days of his comparative innocence, her presence had been a rebuke to him, how should he bear it now? how endure, without some fatal self-betrayal, the bitter mockery of her spiritual hero-worship, which could never do more for him, now, than show the height from which he had fallen? For he had stood on that height once; surely her estimate of him

had once, at least, been justified by facts. He could not part with that last shred of self-complacency—not yet. But, oh! if wishes, passionate almost to prayer, could have kept her away!

And yet at times, as from infinite distance beyond the region of the possible, there came to him a thought that, if one could only afford to be sorry, here was a heart into whose pure pity, into whose infinite motherliness, penitence might be poured, not indeed without shame, yet without the worst of bitterness; might sob itself out at her knee, from a soul humbled indeed utterly, yet which she would not suffer to feel itself humiliated beyond hope of resurrection.

What did it all matter? seeing that he at least could not afford to be sorry. Because for him the first condition of repentance must be confession, and confession must mean punishment, and that—take what form it would, must so far involve Mattie as to make the breach between them hopeless, complete, impassable. He hardened himself, therefore, to the best of his ability, succeeded sometimes, sometimes failed, and in either case was miserable.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN the brief, warm sunshine of a July afternoon the most unfairly used and deeply injured man in South Africa stood leaning, with crossed arms, upon the balcony of the Kimberley Club. Gerald Blake had not the shadow of a doubt as to the justice of the above description. No words of which he had the command could adequately express his opinion of the world in general, so far as concerned its relations to himself. Presently he withdrew his gaze from the recesses of the gum-trees, to which it had apparently been directed, and turned it upon a mail letter which he took out of his pocket. There was nothing more to be extracted from it this time of reading than there had been from the numerous perusals with which he had honored it before—why he should have been so persistent in harrowing up his soul with its most uncomfortable contents it would not be easy to say. Perhaps just because they did harrow up his soul, and he found a melancholy satisfaction in the process. If he had no one else to be sorry for him, he would, at least, savor to the utmost every pang of the exquisite pity he was feeling for himself.

He read it through once more, therefore, then replaced it with the air of one for whom life can hold no more possibilities of pained surprise. He raised his eyes again and began to look idly up and down the length of Dutoitspan Road, but he saw nothing of what there might have been to see; strangely enough, his whole mental vision was occupied with the form of a woman, and that woman Sophy de Jongh.

And he saw her mercilessly. She had, naturally, never been attractive; now that she had become a necessity she appeared nothing else than repulsive. He saw her in detail; from the sort of shallow elliptical curve in which her neatly parted hair lay flatly on each side of her gentle brow—a brow which, in itself, was somehow so suggestive of the larger domestic ruminants—down to the sturdy feet which went with a certain honest ponderous reflectiveness which seemed to say that though motion was not agreeable to the owner, she would yet go far if you gave her time. Somehow he could never see an ox-wagon without thinking of Sophy.

And to this he must tie himself for life; his days of liberty, even his hours, were numbered. That letter from home had been his last hope, and the letter had destroyed it. The matter admitted no longer of delay. The next forty-eight hours must see his prospects sufficiently established to form, at least, a security for renewed borrowing, or he must be irretrievably disgraced. Besides his tradesmen creditors, who were becoming objectionably clamorous, he had gambling debts, whose discharge within that limited period had become imperative. This very morning, a man to whom he had lost heavily had approached the subject in a tone which was civil merely in form, and had left Gerald more nearly desperate than he had ever been in his life.

He lingered there, on the balcony, sulking with, rather than fighting against, Fate; subsiding gradually from the protest of upbraiding to the protest of plaintiveness, and so to a kind of silent resignation. Of moral compunction he felt none. It is not certain that he did not think—without definitely putting the thought into form—that he was going to confer a favor on Miss de Jongh at his own expense.

By the time he had brought his resolution to the point of starting on his wooing, he had little feeling left except a desire to get it over—a wish that Sophy could, even for a passing hour, be made reasonably attractive, that so the strain on his dramatic faculties might be a little less.

He, once so constant a visitor, had not called on Miss de Jongh for six weeks past, not since the day of the bazaar. Probably he did not realize how long the interval had been. He knew that he had left her, then, in a certain amount of pique; he made little of that; a touch of jealousy in her, a suggestion of aloofness in him—these might be rather to his advantage.

When he came in sight of the once so familiar house, he distinguished a red-gowned figure upon the stoep. Sophy was painfully fond of red, of a peculiarly exasperating shade, something between cherry color and cardinal, and her gowns always looked as if they had been bought out of batches; there was a singular indistinctness about the cut and fit of them.

She turned at the sound of the opening gate; a dim expression of pain gathered in her patient eyes when she saw her visitor. It seemed, for a moment, as if she would have retreated into the house; the movement was checked on the instant, yet Blake had seen the slight embarrassment, and welcomed it as an augury of success.

But when, to such introductory general remarks as he felt constrained to make, she answered in monosyllables, he began to wish most devoutly that she would give him a lead. She had done so before often enough, when he had not cared about it; some opening in the expression of her Arcadian, or perhaps Bœotian, simplicity such as would now have given him an excuse for being carried away into forgetting the restraint which an honorable pride had urged him to keep upon his feelings. But how can one be carried away by monosyllables? and how, on the other hand, could he, without encouragement, make a proposal so obviously audacious?—for, of course, she knew his exact position, it was no secret anywhere.

He was at the end of all his small-talk—it may be imagined that he had not come out well supplied with that article, under the circumstances; from necessity, rather than from will, he at last ceased to speak. The silence that ensued was a thing to feel. It was sheer desperation that at last inspired Gerald with the idea of turning that to account; if it had lasted a moment longer he must have practically fled, and that he dared not do.

“You—you must be thinking me wretchedly dull company this afternoon,” he began, laughing nervously; “but there are times, you see—times when—when, in fact, a fellow can’t—One has feelings, you see, and one can’t always be doing the Spartan boy, and all that sort of thing, you know.”

And then it occurred to him that she probably would not understand the allusion to that classical youth, and the idea seemed funny—he could not imagine why—and he laughed again, more nervously than before. That horrible silence was coming on once more; he went on, running from it as one tries to run in a nightmare.

“I—I came to say good-by.” (She drew one more sudden breath; it was the breath of relief.) “You know why it is the only course—in fact, why I am bound—why I can’t, mustn’t—why I daren’t come here any more; because—because in days when—when hope would not have been so—so presumptuous—I mean, of course, it would always have been presumptuous, but—but—”

Sophy stood motionless; she had not asked her visitor to be seated, nor had she seated herself. Her eyes were fixed pertinaciously on a geranium in a tin, which she had been watering when he arrived; her hands, loosely locked together, hung straight before her. There was not a trace of nervousness in her any more; nothing but a sort of passive resistance, which seemed to defy heaven and earth to move her either to speech or motion. Blake began to feel puzzled.

“In those days you must have seen something of my feelings for you,” he went on, with a comparative fluency born of increasing desperation. “Now that circumstances have changed, while these still remain the same, it is hard—too hard, for me to go on as—as we were before. Sophy!” he broke out suddenly, “I ought never, I meant never to have said this; but when I saw you—when I fancied—in fact, oh! forgive me, it seemed as if in your silence a—a revelation—I suppose it was a delusion—some impossible happiness— But there are times when silence seems—seems to say so much, don’t you know, and it was too sudden for me!”

With a very creditable impulsiveness, all things considered, he made a movement to seize one of her hands. For a moment the locked fingers entwined a little more tightly; but when he put a sort of gentle force into his clasp, she yielded to it—an inert, emotionless yielding as of something not worth dispute. She neither stirred nor raised her eyes.

“Oh, Sophy,” he continued, “you have hurried me out of what the world would consider my honor. I have gone too far now to retract, and—and, if I have read your heart aright, I think you will be merciful. Sophy, I have nothing to offer you except—except—” (no; somehow he could not say it, but the break in his voice might

pass muster for emotion), "and in yourself you are so—so much to me that all the rest seems of no account if you will only let me call you mine!"

"No, thank you, Mr. Blake."

Her voice was toneless; she scarcely looked at him. For a moment he thought he had not heard aright.

"Sophy!"

"No, please, you must not call me Sophy. And you must not hold my hand like that. No. And I thank you very much for the honor you have done me" (she meant no sarcasm; she thought this was the proper form under all similar circumstances); "but no, thank you, I do not want to marry you. No."

There was a sort of dull finality in the very sound of this recurrent monosyllable; the whole being of the woman, her whole enormous power of negative volition, seemed to have concentrated itself in this one word. Blake realized it at last, and a great rage blazed up within him.

"Then what, in Heaven's name, have you meant—" were the words that trembled on his tongue; he actually had to press his lips tight to keep them in, to put physical force upon himself lest he should say something for which his conscience would never forgive him—his conscience as a gentleman, a curious social phenomenon, which survived the wreck that vanity and sloth and selfishness had long since made of his moral one. He released her hand; she stood now as before. It was as if an automaton had been wound up to speech, and, the set form accomplished, had relapsed into the dumbness and inertia natural to it.

"Then," he said, mastering his voice with an effort, "then I have only to apologize for having allowed my imagination so far to mislead me as to—to annoy you with—with— I will say good-afternoon, Miss de Jongh," he ended, desperately.

She returned his bow with a mechanical movement of her head; the garden gate had scarcely closed behind him when she went through the window into the house, with something of the dragging, furtive action with which an animal crawls away to seek a solitude for death.

For some time Gerald Blake walked on, with no perception of where he was going. When he realized his whereabouts, he found himself in the neighborhood of the Public Gardens. Mechanically he passed in through the white gates at the bottom of the long, straight walk, till he came upon one of the few rough and often-removed

benches which border the rather dreary road. He sat down—sat with his head dropped upon his hands, stunned. He knew now that he had never known a doubt, that he had held this way of escape from all his embarrassments to be absolutely secure; and he had a right to think so—with a fresh access of fury he told himself this again and again.

What was he to do now? He had formed no plan, however vague, as an alternative in case of failure, for he had never contemplated the possibility of failure. Yet he must do something, something, and at once; yes, if he had only time to turn round, he could make combinations, devise means—there must be some. But even time Fate had denied him. It would seem she would deny him the power of thought. That foolish alliterative catchword! he did not want to dwell upon it. "Death rather than dishonor"? well, of course; yet anything short of dishonor (as he understood that) rather than death. But what? what? His thoughts seemed to swing round and round, and on no side to grasp anything. He raised his head, passed his hand across his eyes as though to clear his ideas by main force; and thus, looking up, he caught sight of Mr. Solomon's house, facing him between the trees.

Shadowy almost to nonentity was that hope of salvation; the difficulties in the way of apprehending it insuperable by any courage or ingenuity less than those inspired by despair. At the first shock of the thought, Blake's sense of the possible reeled back from it as much as did his inclination. Then he forced his mind to familiarize itself with the idea. The thing was possible, for the woman was ambitious; he thought she would hold position to be cheaply purchased by a little sacrifice of pique. However, whether or no, it had to be tried; it was either that or one's revolver.

He stood up, yet a nameless something fettered his very limbs, making every step go heavily. It was nothing else than real fear—he had always been secretly afraid of Dora; the circumstances under which he approached her now were not likely to prove reassuring. He was so far gone in despair that he actually confessed to himself that he was afraid, without his vanity giving so much as a writhe; he soothed himself as one might soothe an outsider: "Foolish; what was there to be afraid of? after all, she could only say 'no.'" And if she did that? Well, then— But that was a question beside the point just now; he could not afford any mental digressions.

Miss Solomon was at home and alone. When her visitor came in her eyes darted irrepressible triumph for one infinitesimal fraction

of time; she received him graciously, offered him tea, which he declined. As he did not, could not, at once force even mere voice (he had not left the Gardens till he had the words of his task by heart), she began to talk herself, and talked with an ease and a fluency which he had not known to be in her.

"Perhaps you were wanting to see my father?" she suggested, sweetly, at last, when she saw that he had recovered himself up to vocal point. "I expect him in almost at once, if you can wait."

"Thank you, Miss Solomon," said Gerald, desperately embracing the opening; "but whether I may have the—the privilege of seeking an interview with Mr. Solomon depends upon you."

"Really?" said Dora, as sweetly as before.

But she did not wish to disconcert him by too great an affectation of lack of comprehension, and it was not conspicuous in her tone.

"Yes; I come to put my fate in your hands. This is a bold step, you will think; but you would give me no opportunity of expressing the admiration I have felt for—for months—for your gifts of mind and—and person."

He watched her with a sort of fascination, feeling unable to change one word of his preconceived address, however she might take it. She bowed slightly; she did not seem displeased.

"So I had to make one. I have often felt—felt quite sorry, you know, that one so fitted to shine in any society should be thrown away in a place like Kimberley; it has its good points, of course, but you must feel, as I do—" he gave a feeble smile, which she graciously gave back to him.

"You know something of the state of my affairs, Miss Solomon," he continued. "In view of those embarrassments, I felt a natural hesitation in begging you to—to—in fact, to give me the right to procure for you that position which is so evidently meant for you. But if you could bring yourself to overlook them—and—and a genius like yours would soon disperse them; if you could—if you only could! Oh, Miss Solomon, could you?"

She raised her eyes and looked him very straight in the face; her expression was enigmatical.

"You want me to marry you?" she said, with sufficient directness.

"That—that was what I had ventured to hope," murmured Gerald, not ungrateful for the plainness, yet slightly taken aback.

She made a sign of comprehension; after a moment she rose

from her seat and took a pace or two as if considering. He watched her anxiously. She spoke—and an almost physical shock ran through him. So might the doomed guest have felt when to the banquetting-hall they brought in the black bull's head.

"That is to say," she said, "that as Miss de Jongh proves insensible to the privilege of paying your debts, you graciously condescend to give me the refusal?"

Blake started to his feet.

"If—if you can think that, Miss Solomon—" he stammered; and was choked with blank bewilderment and rage and shame.

"I am not talking in 'ifs,'" she said, contemptuously. "I talk of what I know. You said truly enough that I know something of your difficulties; do you suppose I can't guess what would be your first way out of them? For the rest—I myself have told her some plain truths; I told them to her on the day of the bazaar. They were not pleasant truths, and she will never speak to me again for having told them; yet I knew she would act upon them if she had the time to let them work into her. And you have given her time."

No amount of self-restraint could quite suppress one brief sound of entire confounding.

"She has acted upon them, and she was wise. I did not tell them because I cared for her; yet to any girl I cared for, if I thought she had any heart to break, I would have given the same advice. The woman that marries *you* had best not be a woman that loves you."

She paused: she watched him, and her soul seemed to itself to dilate with a triumph that was half torture by virtue of its very fury. She spoke no more till, with a sudden choked word, and a gesture—a fierce parody of still instinctive courtesy—he began to move towards the door. Then she simply placed herself in front of it, barring all exit, except by violence. He stopped short. She waved her hand, with a gesture worthy of the dramatic power found so often in the women of her race.

"Wait a little," she said, "you can afford to. I have waited a long time." She seemed, in one long breath, to exhale in this moment the weariness of all those months of waiting. "Yes; you thought I was only a Jewess, the daughter of a Jew broker—what do I say? a broker! He was a bar-man not so very long ago; I am not too young to remember the days of the canteen. Why should I deny it? All Kimberley knows it well enough. And you thought

that a woman like that would jump at such a chance as you had to offer. To be made a lady of! Good heavens! by what a *gentleman!*" She swept him from head to foot in a glance of burning comment. "Oh! if I had ever been foolish enough to wish to be a lady, I should be glad now that my wish wasn't granted; I would renounce it, to-day, forever—if I even had had it—out of sheer gratitude; because, if I had been a lady, I could not have spoken my mind now."

Her hearer's mind was not sufficiently disengaged to allow him to perceive the distinct flavor of sour grapes in this speech; otherwise it might have been a little consolation. For, indeed, Dora was sacrificing her ambition to her revenge—a thing it is not given to a small hatred to accomplish.

"Yes," she repeated; "he asks me to marry him. Listen." She spoke now without any mark of violent excitement; an occasional long-drawn breath the only interruption to her measured tones. Only her eyes flashed wide, slow sheet-lightnings, and her hands, which hung straight down by her sides, opened and shut continually, like the jaws of a trap. "Listen. If I had not more compassion for myself than I have even hatred of you, I would take you at your word. Yes; *I would* marry you—gentleman-loafer though you are, eaten up with laziness and softness and selfishness and conceit. I would marry you, I say, and avenge on you the wrong done to manhood by such a creature calling itself a man. For you are a coward at bottom." The glance she gave him here deprived him of so much back-bone as he still had left. "I could make all your life one long fear. I would rule you with a rod of iron. In three months' time you should not dare to call your soul your own. Oh, my gentleman," she went on, with a touch of quicker, fiercer scorn, "that aren't too fine to owe your bread to a woman, I would soon let you know the taste of the bread that you would owe to *me*. If anything could make *you* feel as if you would have done better to choose starvation, that should have come near to do it. It is not worth it; revenge itself isn't worth the weariness, the self-disgust of being bound to *you*."

Perhaps it struck her that she had made this picture of a future he had, after all, escaped, so unattractive as to be rather stimulating to gratitude and relief than to more painful emotions. At any rate she changed her tone.

"And it would not be revenge enough. Given the means of getting fashionable clothes, and a good dinner every day, *you* would

manage to find life tolerable after all. But now you won't have them long. And then? Have you ever watched a man going down? *I* have—one sees plenty of it out here. For a time one sees him in the old places, only getting just a little shabbier, more sneaking, so to say, every week. Then, by and by he disappears. He has gone under. Do you know where the people go to that disappear? They don't die; oh, no, not at once. It takes some time before one reads: 'The body of a white man, unknown, was found on the veld near—such and such a place—yesterday morning'; with the 'death due to exposure' verdict, as usual. There's a great deal of very rough odd-jobbing and starvation and degradation that may be felt even through the drink one takes to drown it, before one comes to that."

Then, as if the very ferocity of her description had brought passion to exploding point in her own breast, she stepped to the door, and, as it were, tore it open. With the other hand she pointed, as to some unseen gulf without.

"Go!" she cried, in a voice worthy of her gesture, "go—to all that!" The words might be ineffective, inadequate for a climax, in themselves; the tone, the manner, rendered them nothing less than tremendous.

Gerald Blake lifted to her a face which, long days after, she would have been glad to forget. Now it only added satisfaction to her scarcely yet satiated revenge. So at least she thought; but, in the confusion of her excitement, it is fair to say that her feelings were not very clear to her own self. The look lasted but a second; the next moment, with head bent as it had been all the while, he had gone, in a heavy silence.

She was alone, and it was all over—the dream of an ambition, and the accomplishment of a vengeance dreamed of well-nigh as long, and in as fond a fulness of detail. Almost any woman feeling as she did then would have indulged her over-wrought nerves with the luxury of a good cry. Dora stood a moment to allow them a brief rest; then her will took command of them again. Resolutely shutting her mind to a chaotic contemplation—neither thought nor coherent memory—which brought that strange strangling in her throat, she went upstairs, forcing both face and manner to an indifference as complete as though she had just taken her part in an ordinary morning call. There, sternly disregarding the sensible rebellion of nature, testified by a physically uncontrollable tremulousness of every limb, she began to gather together and lay in

order the various details of her toilette for a dance she was to attend that night.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"You'RE not going out again to-night, are you, Sam?"

Arkwright, who certainly had got up from the supper-table with that object, looked slightly uncomfortable. He stood with his hand on his overcoat, arrested in the act of taking it down from the peg.

"Only just for half an hour or so," he said, in a conciliatory, half-shamed voice. "I sha'n't be late, old lady."

Sarah could not force her face to the inexpressiveness of her tongue. The sigh she suppressed betrayed itself in the unsuspected wistfulness of her sad, pale eyes; they were often heavy eyes in these days, too.

Her husband took down his coat, and shook himself into it with a touch of impatience.

"A fellow must have a bit of amusement sometimes," he said. "You don't think I'm after any harm?"

"I don't think *you* are, but I'm not so sure your friends aren't. And if they don't mean any by you—oh, Sam, can any one touch pitch without being defiled? Oh, Sam, forgive me; I feel as if I should be unfaithful to be silent any longer. The others—I didn't *know* anything against them, and I've tried to think better of them than I feel. But when it comes to that Mr. Westoby—"

"I don't know why you've taken up such a dislike to *him*," said Sam. "He's not half a bad fellow—clever, too. He's pretty well worked out a notion in cart-brakes that's the neatest thing I've seen for a long time. He showed me just the way of it the other day in the shops. Of course, he's had a rough sort of life, and he don't set up for being a saint; but a man needn't be such a shocking bad lot as you make out, because he ain't just all that."

"Sam, it isn't only what I know of the sort of man he is from having been in his company myself. I didn't tell you, because I hoped there wouldn't be any need; but Mr. Graham was up here a day or two back, and he said how sorry he was you seemed so taken with Mr. Westoby—he had never known any good come of it to anybody. He's a good man, Sam, as well as a good master; he said for all Mr. Westoby did such a big business with him, he'd be

sorry for the day he'd ever seen him or his money, if you got into trouble by getting to know him while you were in *his* employ, even though it was only by taking orders; he said he'd never had a foreman he thought such a deal of, Sam," she added, with a rather forlorn attempt at propitiation. "He said he would never speak to him himself about anything but wagons. He said he'd given you a hint, but he was afraid you didn't but half believe him."

"He told me the detectives wouldn't believe in the character of an angel that was as thick with Mr. Westoby as I looked to be," returned Sam, "if he calls that a hint. If they are such fools, they may be, for me. For that matter, I dare say, half the stories about him are just yarns; there's tales about everybody. And at the worst—well, I. D. B. ain't murder. It's only in this blessed place that the officials seem to think you may make holes in all the Commandments cheaper than you can in this one of their own making. The whole thing is half lawyer's rot—a made-up crime, worried out by a beastly system. It's my belief that they and their precious traps make half the cases they're so cock-a-hoop about finding themselves; and I'm not the only one that thinks it, neither. I'll make bold to say there's cleaner hands to be found among certain poor wretches on the Breakwater than some in the Department that sent them there. I know whose conscience I'd sooner have of the two—put it at the worst."

"Sam, dear, I know you don't mean such things; you couldn't be wanting to defend dishonesty—stealing. But don't go talking that way, outside; don't, dear. It isn't safe; other people won't know you don't mean it."

"I *do* mean it," replied Sam, being now well mounted on a hobby.

His temperament did give him a very special aversion to the system, and his mind was not more logical than is that of the general public; which is indeed a sentimental rather than a reasoning body. "This system is bad; therefore the sufferers under the system are, if not exactly saints, at least martyrs." The general public sees no incoherence in such a statement as that; and from the martyr to the hero is the most elementary step in popular apotheosis.

"Never mind, missus; you needn't take on about me," added Sam. "I'm not going in for the trade myself. Trust me for that; look at it all round and the risk ain't worth it."

He nodded cheerfully, and went out, his momentarily ruffled temper restored already to its usual state of sunny calm. But Sarah went back into the room with a great despair growing about her

heart. She sat down by the table, folding her hands upon it in unwonted idleness; then, with an instinct almost as much of the wearied body as of the harassed soul, she dropped suddenly to her knees, and let the waves of the accumulated bitterness of many weeks roll over her bowed head.

"The risk not worth it!" Was that all he had to go upon? A poor defence, indeed, against a temptation whose power over him she greatly overrated. "He that maketh haste to be rich shall fall into temptation and a snare." Had he not thrown up work which gave him—she saw it with pleasure, though she could not understand—a valuable practical influence over souls, merely to "better himself"?—hateful words! Well, to escape some trifling annoyances, no doubt, incident to his changed position under the new dynasty. Sarah, who had served many months' apprenticeship to far more serious discomforts, was tempted to think this but the reason of feeble folk.

When a move had been first proposed, she had pleaded against this particular one with a warmth which she seldom put into any argument involving an opposition to his wish. She had pleaded as she would have pleaded for his soul, for, indeed, she believed no less than that to be at stake. Nor had there been anything in his conduct since their arrival calculated to reassure her. He seemed to her to have got loose from his moorings altogether; she felt no moment's security that he was not drifting, in sheer gayety of heart, to moral shipwreck.

He was not doing this; but she was so far right in her ideas as that Sam was certainly, just now, mentally, a little *grisé*. He was like a school-boy in his first holidays. After the seclusion, the propriety, the thousand conventionalities of Beulah, Kimberley seemed to him a perfect Liberty Hall, and he was disposed to make the most of it. He did not take much harm; there was a certain soundness and sweetness of nature about him which refused to assimilate nastiness in any shape. But it cannot be denied that he was tolerably silly—his innate boyishness seeming to effervesce rather than settle down—and that his choice of associates did but little credit to his common-sense; though Westoby alone, perhaps, came under the head of actual bad company.

Sam's "half-an-hour or so" lengthened out, as his wife had well expected, to an hour long past her usual bed-time. She did not sit up; she knew he disliked it, though he had never shown temper on the subject, and, since it seemed she could not save, she would do

nothing for mere reproach. But the anxiety which banished sleep was certainly not lightened as she lay listening to Westoby's unmistakable voice and laugh on the stoep, rolling its bass thunder for long after the sound of Sam's step had let her know of his return. It was quite a quarter of an hour before Sam did actually enter the house. He paused at the door of the room, turning the handle, at last, with such elaborate quietness, and entering with such tip-toe precaution, that she had not the heart to refuse the innocent deception of a sleep he so evidently hoped to find. But she seemed to be able to see with her ears; certain sounds—the click of a lock, the chink of coin, counted out with caution, a low whistle of disconcertion—these haunted her heart for days; then they faded like other ghosts, and lurked, unseen, in wait for her dark hour.

The cautious steps went out again; the door shut; once more Westoby's voice smote her ear—he was not gone, then. Now he was, though; the heavy, lounging step died in the distance, and Sam came back. She could not have spoken now.

Westoby, strolling back to his rooms in Thompson Street, was thinking little enough of her, though little beyond a desire to annoy her had prompted him to get up an intimacy in which he found not much of either interest or profit. Such wretched winnings as he had taken from Arkwright that evening were not worth dignifying with the name; and he knew this young man's character so much better than did the young man's wife, that he would never have wasted time in trying to make a tool of him. For the rest, if Arkwright should suffer in reputation by this association, that was his affair; it is just to say that Westoby had never really given a thought to that side of the subject. He did want to torment Sarah; he had no particular desire to inflict serious injury on Sam. It was scarcely like Westoby to go out of his way thus, for no advantage beyond the gratification of what he would have called "pure cussedness"; but it was not the only matter in which, in these days, he was not quite like his old self.

At his rooms he found, to his surprise, Christian Dreyer waiting for him. The canteen-keeper was, by no means, a frequent visitor. Now, too, it was barely eleven o'clock, and Dreyer seldom left the bar at night before closing time. It was, therefore, presumable that he had something of importance to communicate. His face, when he turned it on Westoby's entrance, implied the same; it was anxious, at once deprecatory and remonstrant.

Westoby threw himself into a chair.

"Well?" he said, shortly; and beyond a sufficiently curt nod on entering, that was all the greeting he vouchsafed.

Dreyer cleared his throat; his eyes sought the other's face, as if reconnoitring, and seemed to find nothing reassuring. In fact, of late, Westoby's temper had been more often bad than good.

"Well!" repeated Westoby. "Look alive, now; I suppose you ain't come over just for the pleasure of looking at me?"

Dreyer, resting one elbow on the table, and making as though to shield his eyes from the lamp-light, said from behind his hand,

"Wronsky's back."

Wronsky was the most redoubtable member of the detective police, who had been home on leave.

"Queen Anne's dead," retorted Westoby, contemptuously. "You never came over to tell me that?"

"He'll be making things lively for the trade," said Dreyer, still tentatively. "They say he's been over to Paris, and I don't know where all; brought back no end of wrinkles."

Westoby merely shrugged; the gesture neither contradicted nor confirmed. Dreyer seemed to screw up his courage.

"Well—it may be all lies, Baas, I don't know—but Heinemann came over to my place this afternoon, and he said—"

"Well?" said Westoby, for the third time; and now there was a suggestion of menace in his tone which forbade any such trifling as drawing back, though it was far from encouraging to proceed.

"Well!" said Dreyer, desperately, "he said that you were in the bar at the 'Bricklayers' Arms' last night."

"I was. Go on."

"And you ran on pretty free; had half a row with some of 'em over that missionary chap of yours—and there was names brought in, and a good bit of tall talk, and he thought some one should give you a hint."

"He told you I was drunk, I suppose?"

Dreyer hesitated. "I didn't believe him," he said, conciliatingly; "I did think, maybe, you had been drinking."

"And if I had, did you ever know me lose my head for that?"

"No, Baas," he said, with truth. "But I have known it touch your temper; and if those fellows—I know which of 'em was there, and they're a low lot—if they were very riling, I don't know but what you may have said more what you meant or thought for. Anyway, that's what he said."

Westoby rose to his feet.

"Then you may curse him from me for a meddling, officious blockhead," he returned, furiously; "and tell him if he wants to let me know that he thinks I'm a d—d whiskey-sodden fool, that don't know when to keep a close mouth, he'd best come to me next time and say it to my face."

He threw himself into his chair again; Dreyer waited till he had let off enough of his temper in expletives to admit a hope of getting a patient hearing.

"There ain't no use in taking it like that," he said, shaking his head mournfully. "Like enough you said nothing that mightn't be said fair enough among friends, and no harm thought. If that was all, I reckon he might have brought his messages himself, before I thought to take 'em. But it ain't."

He paused; except that Westoby had ceased to mutter, it was not easy to say whether he was attending or no.

"Because Heinemann says that after you were gone out, he could take his oath he saw Wronsky in the bar; he must have been there all the time, for Heinemann was by the door, and he knows no one came in while the row was going on. He says Wronsky was made up so as his own mother wouldn't have known him; but he swears it was him, and I never did know that chap mistaken yet."

"Didn't you?" said Westoby, sarcastically. He paused a moment; Dreyer hoped that he was taking a serious view of the case. The next words disappointed him. "You mean that you never knew him ready to swear that a man *wasn't* a detective, not that you ever knew him make any bones about swearing he *was*. Of course, if a chap starts with the craze that every party he can't ticket off quite clear in his mind is bound to be *that*, it's long odds but what he's right once in a hundred times or so."

"You don't believe it?"

"Not without a deal more evidence than the notion of a chap that goes about in one everlasting funk, like him."

Dreyer relapsed into silence; he watched Westoby carefully, but could see nothing to guide him as to whether this incredulity was assumed or real.

"Then you ain't going to take any notice?" he ventured at last.

"No, if you particularly want to know, I'm not."

There was another pause; then, looking everywhere except at Westoby, Dreyer said, in a would-be airy tone which was a signal failure,

"Hadn't I better give the Reverend a hint, anyway?"

Westoby's temper was ablaze in an instant.

"No, confound you!" he thundered, furiously. "Haven't I told you I wouldn't have you putting your finger into that pie? I'd be glad to know how much mischief you've done with your d—d meddling already. If I find any trouble in that quarter, I shall know who I have to thank."

"It won't be me, Baas, anyhow," replied Dreyer. The nature of his errand had prepared him for such infinite possibilities in the way of Westoby's temper, that no display could greatly surprise him. "I've never said a word to him in that way but what I've had from you. And as for trouble—I reckon you may make your mind easy on that score. I don't believe the poor chap has a kick left in him by now."

"Poor chap!" sneered Westoby. "Only the other day you were fit to split your sides over the notion; now you're forever snivelling over him. Your Dutch sentiment!" he broke out, savagely. Then with a change to as savage sarcasm, "Better go and take him some of those tracts he used to let off on you; tell him he's been a sad, naughty boy, but his mammy's waiting for him at home, and got his little old pinny to wipe his eyes with, if he'll go right back and say he's sorry."

"No," said Dreyer, nettled for a moment beyond prudence or forbearance. "Your Mrs. Arkwright can do that dodge better nor me. I'll leave it to her."

The change in Westoby's face went beyond anything his already repentant companion had anticipated. It was as if, up till now, he had only been playing at passion. His manner, under the very stress of his rage, acquired a sort of self-control. He pointed to the door.

"If you've made fool enough of yourself for one night, I reckon you'd better go," he said, heavily.

Dreyer, much wishing his words unsaid, took the hint. He gained the door in silence. There he lingered a moment, fumbling with the lock.

"Only a joke, Baas," he said, deprecatingly. "Come to that, he seems as anxious to give her a wide berth, when she does come, as you could wish; and it's not often she's over, anyway. There's nothing in that; but if you could give a thought to that notion of Heinemann's—"

He broke off. Westoby, standing by the table, his great fists clenched and his eyes almost hidden beneath the heavy frown of his

shaggy brows, might have been deaf and blind. Further expostulation was obviously useless and might be dangerous; Dreyer did not make the experiment.

Outside in the street there were few passengers; the moon was bright and strong; a clock struck the half-hour before midnight. Dreyer walked on slowly, shaking his head a little now and again.

"I hope he'll think it over; I hope he will. He never was a man to take a hint of that sort as one might say kindly; but I've known him act on it afterwards, though he might swear at the time. But I don't quite know what's come to him just now. I reckon, though, I'll take it on myself to give the missionary a hint. It can't hurt, anyway; if this should be all my eye, why, he'll not split on me, I'll be bound. And if it's a deal too true to be pleasant, maybe the Baas 'll live to thank me for the job himself." (This was to be very sanguine, indeed, for Westoby had little more tolerance for profitable than for unprofitable disobedience. But, in truth, Dreyer had not the nerve to face a crisis of such apparent gravity in total inaction. He must feel he was doing something to avert it.) "I don't know why he is always so down upon that Runciman fellow," his thoughts wandered on; "he's done well enough for us so far. If he don't take care, I'm thinking the poor chap 'll slip through his fingers. He looks now as if he was walking about to save funeral expenses. But I do hope he'll think this over."

His thoughts had brought him to the end of the street. As he was on the point of crossing over, a cab dashed out of Market Square into the Transvaal Road. Something made him stand to watch it. It rattled on some two hundred yards farther, then drew up where—red-yellow in the white moonlight—the lamp over the police station broke the blank line of the wall of the jail. He could just distinguish figures. Two men got down, then a third; even at that distance a practised eye could read the situation in the varying action. The cab drove off.

Dreyer's face took on a sickly shade.

"*Allemagtig!*" he groaned, interiorly; "I knew it—he's beginning! I wonder, now, which of the fellows is that?"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE dance at the Pirate's Club had worked up from its first tepid beginnings to the full glow of enjoyment; the well-lighted room was full of scent and music and the sliding rustle of twinkling feet, the high-pitched chatter of cheerful voices, the flutter of whirling muslin and lace.

Dora Solomon was in unusual spirits. Under the influence of the excitement of the dance, which she could feel like any other girl, the revenge which had for a while threatened to taste but dust and ashes after all, seemed to fulfil everything that she had ever dreamed of it. The memory of that hour glowed in her veins like wine; her heart beat to a measure which, of European races, the Celtic alone, perhaps, can fully understand. The vision, haunting still, of a cowed form, a white face dark with helpless wrath, now seemed necessary to her complete satisfaction; she could as little have spared it from her thought as could the hero of a triumph have dispensed with the train of captives behind his car.

The last hurrying bars of a waltz had ended in a few unwelcome chords; the dancers were betaking themselves to seats, or promenading round the room in couples, after South African fashion. Dora, seated not far from the entrance, was talking to her late partner, a youth fresh from England, with unwonted graciousness, and watching with an amused eye, more indulgent than usual, the varying humors of the march past, when she noticed one of the attendants, standing doubtfully in the door-way, scrutinizing the different groups. She drew her companion's attention to the man.

"He seems to be looking for some one," she said.

"Perhaps Dr. Brown is trying Bob Sawyer's dodge of getting himself advertised," he replied; but before Dora could answer, the man was standing before her.

"There's a gentleman outside wants to speak to you, Miss Solomon," he said.

"Me?" she said, incredulously. "You must have made a mistake."

"No, miss; it was you, for sure. And he said as he must see you at once."

Dora stood up, with a touch of annoyance in her manner.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"He didn't give no name, miss."

The girl turned to her partner.

"I suppose I must interview this very mysterious individual for myself," she said, with a short laugh; and behind the circling couples she passed out with little attention excited.

The attendant led the way to the room set apart for the ladies' cloak-room. He left her at the door; going in she found herself in the presence of a man somewhat on the hither side of middle age—a stranger to her. Dora looked a rather haughty interrogation.

"Miss Solomon, I believe?" said the stranger. His voice was quiet, but not annoyingly subdued.

She slightly bowed an assent. He went across to the door, which she had left a little ajar, and closed it. Then she noticed that the maid in charge of the cloak-room was gone. Something in her breast seemed to give a little warning flutter—enough to signal her to self-control. The man came back into the room.

"My name is Wronsky," he said, and paused.

The flutter was in her throat, now; she put one gloved hand suddenly on the back of a chair, but lying there it did not visibly tremble.

The detective went on, after a moment,

"It has unfortunately been my duty to arrest your father for a contravention of the Diamond Trade Act. I thought I should not be going beyond what my superiors would justify me in, by granting his request that you should be allowed to see him before—before he goes."

She bent her proud head for some half-minute; turned red and pale. Wronsky watched her with some anxiety. Before he had quite prepared himself for hysterics she looked up.

"I will come at once," she said, quietly, and already even her color seemed to be coming under her control. "I must thank you for your considerateness. It would not have been pleasant for me to have felt that I had been dancing, while he was— To have come home to find him—" She stopped; for all her coolness it was not easy to say the actual words. "You need not call the maid, thank you," she added, as he was leaving the room, with a muttered suggestion to that effect; "I shall want no assistance."

She had already turned to look for her opera-cloak among the bright-colored heaps of cashmere and plush.

The detective went out.

"By Jove!" he said to himself, with infinite relief; "she's a good plucked one. *She* ought to have been the man, rather than that poor-spirited old fellow over there. It's not from him she gets her nerve, anyway"; for he had not been favorably impressed with poor Mr. Solomon's bearing in presence of calamity.

He had scarcely got further in his reflections before Dora came out, cloaked and hooded. She felt more eyes upon her than there were, but made no sign of feeling any.

In the cab she was alone on the back seat; the detective got up in front beside the driver. In a short ten minutes they were at the house. They got down; the driver was bidden to wait. Her escort opened the house-door himself, then that into the dining-room, standing aside to let her pass, then following her in.

She looked round her with clear eyes. On a chair near the door sat a second detective, stolidly, but certainly manifesting no obnoxious glee in the situation. He did not seem to feel it improved by the importation of a woman into it, to judge by the look he exchanged with Wronsky behind her back. There was a smell of spirits in the room; a bottle, and a nearly emptied tumbler of brandy-and-water stood on the table.

"Mr. Solomon felt a bit upset, miss," said his guardian, in a voice which took something of an exculpatory tone from the indignant suspicion which darkened the girl's eyes as she turned them upon him. "A bit upset; but he's better now."

He might have been that; but he was not much to boast of, even so. Huddled together on the big, heavy leather sofa, his eyes sunk, his face haggard, his pale lips loose and tremulous, he looked ten years older than the father from whom she had parted three hours before. As soon as he saw her he began to cry. The detectives exchanged a glance and shrug.

"I have brought your daughter, Mr. Solomon," said Wronsky. "I must ask you to be quick about your leave-taking. I have done all I dare in delaying so long already."

Dora had gone across to the old man. He looked that now. She put one hand firmly on his shoulder.

"Mr. Wronsky is quite right, father," she said, in a voice of clear, not unkind, decision. Her manner was that of a forbearing but very sensible nurse to a feeble-minded patient. "It was kind in

him to allow us this meeting at all; we can't expect him to wait much longer."

The look which the second detective here exchanged with his associate was one of blank amazement. The two withdrew slightly, though not out of earshot; they made some pretence of being interested in the furniture of the room, in the two or three very much framed pictures on the walls, but could not quite refrain from curious glances at the father and daughter.

Indeed, it was a strange scene. Mr. Solomon was still cowering on the sofa, a broken, limp, whimpering old man, his hair dishevelled, his very clothes—ill-fitting at the best of times—seeming to participate in the general disorder and dismay. Over him stood Dora. She had cast aside the muffler which she had thrown over her head, and there was a sparkle of jewels among the thick black coils and plaits of her hair. She stood a little bent down over him; one fine bare arm, from which the crimson cloak had fallen back, was half round his shoulder; the other, hanging by her side, was hidden all but the white-gloved hand which still unconsciously held her fan. Beneath her cloak her ball-dress fell in a misty cloud. She was pale; but the complete, the even commanding composure of both face and manner was little short of bewildering. In the shadow of the very grip of the law, she was not only uncowed, she was actually mistress of the situation.

"Come, father," she began. She spoke gently, but her voice did not falter, and her tone was stimulating rather than coaxing. "You had something to tell me, hadn't you? Come, you mustn't fret yourself like this. Why, dear me! you may be back to-morrow."

She tried to speak as if she thought this probable, but her conviction was so much to the contrary that the attempt was a failure. It was plain from his lack of response how entirely he was at one with her very gloomiest secret forebodings.

She changed her line of consolation.

"And if the worst comes to the worst," she said "(we'll hope it won't, but there's no harm in being prepared), still you must try and put a good face on it. It wouldn't be nice, of course, but I don't suppose it would be as bad as one thinks—oh, not nearly!—nothing ever is. And, even if it should be all that, it would only be just at first; one gets used to things so soon."

She made a little movement, half caress, half encouragement, with the hand that lay upon his bowed neck. He did but begin to rock himself to and fro, muttering, "My poor girl! my poor girl!"

"You mustn't worry about me," she said, firmly; "I should manage. (Mind, I'm only saying all this because I don't want you to be bothered even for twenty-four hours—not because I really think there'll be any need.) If there was, I should write to Victoria West, to Cousin Rachel; she'd be glad enough to come and stay with me, I've no doubt. She must have had more than enough of being genteel slavey in such a bear-garden as Adelaide Cohen's house; but she would never have spirit to make a change for herself." She forced herself even to speak lightly, to smile. Indeed, marvellous though this scene in its composure and presence of mind seemed to the spectators, it was really, so far, but the final staging of words and plans which she had rehearsed long since and often—so clearly had she foreseen this end from the beginning. "As for the business," she went on, "you can trust Monty Lyons, and you can trust me; we must do the best we can between us. I dare say we shall be able to keep things going."

He lifted his head from his hands, and stole a pitiful, timid look at her face; then turned his own aside.

"Oh, Lord," he groaned, "however shall I tell her!"

The detective coughed with a sound of impatience, and made a step forward.

"Oh, father," cried Dora, despairingly, "don't be afraid. Do tell me anything there is to tell. I can bear it."

But his lamentations alone answered her.

Wronsky came to the other side of the pair.

"Now, sir," he said; he took Mr. Solomon by the arm and tried to pull him to his feet. At the touch the wretched man wrenched himself away, starting up with a sudden vigor that surprised everybody.

"You might have a little patience," he cried, in a sort of tremulous falsetto of anguish. "Maybe you have a girl of your own at home. Would you find it so easy to tell her she was a beggar—that you had made her one?"

Then his momentary passion died out all at once; he sank back on to the sofa, covering his face with his great, coarse, jewelled hands.

"Now you have it," he moaned; "oh, my poor girl, my poor girl! And I've got to leave you."

There was a silence. For a moment or so Dora's breath came and went with a little catch; her eyes travelled from her father to the detectives with almost a touch of piteousness, of appeal, in their depths. She was but a woman, after all, and she was so very much

alone to bear up under this quite unexpected blow. He who had the power to inflict it, had none to sustain her under it; all her strength must come from herself, and just at first the very consciousness of this seemed to depress her below fighting-mark. In two minutes she had rallied.

"Do you mean really ruined, father," she said, steadily, "or is that just a way of putting it?"

"There's no way of putting it could make it out a worse smash than it is," he replied, miserably. "It will all have to go—house, furniture, everything. I have beggared you, my girl; your father has beggared you. And I meant it for the best; I meant—"

And then he went on in rambling sentences, which might have been meant for explanation, but which were chiefly a moaning jumble of incoherent anathemas against himself, promoters, directors, shares, the very gold itself; against everything and everybody. Dora scarcely heard; she was only thinking that she must not yet begin to think—putting all the energy of her will into the turning away of the eyes of her mind from the abyss just opened at her feet, till she should have solitude and leisure in which to look. Meanwhile, she brought back a sort of mechanical attention to her father. He was talking on now, in a mazed sort of way, seeming scarcely conscious of his situation or surroundings.

"And just for want of time. Another week, and I should have made all straight—a little week—a little week. Less, less, less! Only four-and-twenty hours, and the stuff would have been safe." He struck his head with his clenched fist. "Fool that I was to keep—"

Dora stooped suddenly; she put her arms round his neck and smothered the sentence in a kiss.

"Never mind, father," she said; "I must say good-by now, but I'll be sure to be seeing you again in a few days, and by then I shall have had time to look round a little; things mayn't be so bad as you think, after all. I shall send a line to Monty Lyons first thing to-morrow morning, and he'll come and talk it over." Then in a hurried whisper under cover of an embrace, "For goodness' sake, father, don't give yourself away like that; where's the sense? Surely, you have been cautioned? Do try and pull yourself together! Good-by, dear, good-by!"

Wronsky always affirmed that it was she who gave him the final signal, at this point, with her imperious eyes. This time there was no trouble; Mr. Solomon seemed to have sunk into a state of dazed

quiescence; too limp to make any effort for himself, he submitted to be moved about as they might choose. He did not speak again, only moaned a little, wringing his hands in a distraught kind of way. In less than two minutes the sound of the cab-wheels was dying in the distance.

Dora locked and bolted the front door, making all fast for the night; the metallic clicking sounds, echoing through the empty house, struck upon her ear with a dispiriting effect. It was not nervousness at all. The colonial girls are few who will willingly even sleep in a room by themselves; but it caused this one no fear that, except for a Kaffir boy, sleeping the sleep of the native, just in a little tin lean-to in the yard, she was alone in the house. She was glad to feel alone; to dare, even to be obliged to think. Slowly she extinguished the lamp in the passage, and went back into the dining-room. She felt as if she could realize things better there, and she must realize them.

For a moment she lingered on the threshold. All still the same, and yet all changed. How rich she had been that afternoon, how triumphant! Now it was not yet midnight, and she stood there, mistress still in appearance, in truth a beggar and disgraced. Her glance took in all the signs of comfort, of well-nigh affluence. They were not very refined or artistic signs, it is true, but they were writ large and unmistakable, and were of a nature to appeal to Dora's imagination, which was eminently practical, as no mere æstheticism could ever have done. All gone! Withered with a word; as little hers now, or for evermore, as though she lay already in the last great poverty, dispossessed of earth, forever in her coffin. A beggar! a beggar! She stood there with the jewels on her arms and neck, "rose-lined from the cold" in satin softnesses, and herself seemed to mock herself with her splendor.

Poor Dora! She was not naturally a tender woman, and she was a very proud one; it was scarcely wonderful, that in these first moments she thought more of her own calamities than of those of the father who had brought them on her—and that, largely, by disregarding her earnest advice in every particular. Presently she went slowly over to the sofa, sat down, and leaned her elbow on her knee, covering her face with her hand; and, by and by, some great slow tears welled up into her eyes and brimmed over, and then yet others, and she did not try to check them. They were the only ones she ever wasted on the situation, and nobody saw them; they need not be grudged her. When, after a very few

minutes, she looked up again, she felt the better for them; more soft in heart, less tense in nerve and brain. She took out her handkerchief to wipe the tears away; the little flimsy lace and lawn fiction was wet through at the first touch. She threw it aside.

"People aren't expected to cry in ball-dresses," she said, half aloud, with a rather bitter humor.

She stood up and went to the window. Shutters are unknown in the land; she pulled back the handsome furniture-shop-looking curtains, and stared out into the moonlight. The shadows of the infant gum-trees lay in vague wavering gray flecks upon the garden path; across the road, the serried spears of the aloes on the bank above the ditch stood up sharp and black against the silver-flooded sky. The gate stood open, as if awaiting a return—and the return should never be.

Dora, looking out now with undimmed eyes, made herself no illusions on that point. If she had already heard the sentence pronounced, she could not have felt more certain of it. With the clear-sightedness which she really could not help, even when it almost seemed cynical to herself, she put it at eight years. (It may be said at once that the event proved her correct.)

Eight years! Her intelligence looked at it clearly and steadily enough, but her heart shrank back. She was still young enough for eight years to seem a very formidable space of time. And hard labor; for a man of his age who had scarcely done a stroke of manual work in his life; who hated work of that description with the abhorrence common to his race! Her heart softened to him; it followed him to the cell which he must even now be entering, and she would have liked to be able to be with him, to comfort him, at least through this first miserable night.

"Poor father!" she thought, "it's worse for him than for me."

For her! She paused and looked down the vista of the years; there was no perplexity in her expression, no anxious searching of a dim and doubtful future, only a steadily-faced certainty.

"I must sell as much of my jewels and own things as will fetch anything; that will pay for the rent of a small room, up at Newton or somewhere, for two or three months till my work begins to bring something in. It will have to be dressmaking; my temper is too bad for teaching, and people don't advertise for young *women* with good business capacity and a competent knowledge of book-keeping. If they did, I should get on well enough. As it is, I shall make two ends meet; there's plenty of people will help me

to a connection. And, by and by, when this has blown over a little and people begin to forget,—it won't be long, next year, most likely—Monty Lyons will ask me again to marry him; and this time I shall. He will marry me for my brains; well! that's better than to be married for one's face or one's fortune. And I—I shall marry him for his, and for a home; for me and for father when he comes out. I would marry a fool for that, but I sha'n't need to marry a fool. We respect each other, and understand each other; Monty will get on in the world. I shall not be unhappy."

She sighed though; it is not cheerful to see the future so clearly as this girl saw it, even when that future is not actively disagreeable. The possibilities of life are its best features, perhaps; and for Dora it held no possibilities any more—only necessities and their necessary consequences. For a while longer she stood, with firm lips and eyes neither sad nor bright, fixed only with looking on immutable fate. When some light-minded little clock, in another room, glibly rattled off the strokes of midnight, she roused herself; she did not sigh again.

"Well, I must go to bed," she said. "It's no use sitting up all night—that can't help him, and I must rest. I shall want all my wits about me to-morrow."

She fetched a candle from outside and lighted it, then turned out the lamp and left the room. The drawing-room door just opposite had sprung open; she closed and locked it. In the very act of pulling it to the thought of the scene of the far-off afternoon came upon her for a moment. She had forgotten it; it seemed years ago, as much in point of interest as in time. Then, from the unstable vantage-ground of a prosperity which could not make her his equal, she had hated Gerald Blake; now, from the height of her calamity she could view him with indifference. She laughed, a little drearily, as she went lingeringly up the stair—the feature in the house of which she had been particularly proud.

"There isn't much to choose between our fortunes, now," she muttered. "If he cares for his revenge, he will have it to-morrow. He'll be for crying 'Quits.'"

But Gerald never said anything of the sort.

CHAPTER XXX

GERALD BLAKE, walking westward towards where a red-gold sunset was burning out of dusk, seeing nothing of splendor in heaven or of hope on earth, furious with shame past and desperate with disgrace to come, reached at last the boarding-house where, on sufferance, he still lived. He went straight to his room, meeting no one, and locked himself in. He pulled down the blind, and at once it was night. The room, looking south into a small yard, was so dark that he had to light a candle to find what he wanted; he almost laughed, with a sort of impatience, as he did so. It seemed ridiculous to want a light to shoot one's self, by; a light for these few minutes before one would have done with light forever. He opened a drawer, took out his revolver, and threw it on the table. Then, as if the touch and sight had given him at least a little patience, seeing that the way of escape was now so clear and sure, he stood a little looking round the room.

There was not in all Kimberley a room more bare, now, of every personal luxury than this which, three or four months ago, had been crammed with every species of masculine vanities. There was not a thing left that could be turned into money; the very drawers, he knew, were empty. A little old linen, the clothes he actually wore, a few shillings in his purse: the sum of his earthly possessions was named. Well! it did not matter now. He should never go the way that woman had bidden him; that triumph at least she would never have.

He turned, and took up the revolver. It was clean—in good order; this was not the first time of late that he had faced this contingency. Now it was come; there was nothing to wait for, yet he waited. It was not from any hesitation in his purpose. There was nothing to make him hesitate. He had absolutely no religious instinct that could have restrained him. He could not be said to doubt, because he had never considered the subject enough to get so far. People talk of an unreasoning faith; Gerald was happy in the possession of an unreasoning unbelief. Probably there is almost

as much of the one in the world as of the other. In mere physical courage he did not belie the ordinary traditions of his class and nation; the only thing that could have made him hesitate to accept this solution would have been the faintest, most shadowy glimpse of any other. But he saw none; he accepted this one, therefore, as a matter of course, but he did not pretend to be violently enamoured of it.

He sat down before the table and turned the weapon over in his hands, examining it with a strange mixture of bitter resentment at the fact that he was obliged to use it, and of bitter satisfaction at having it to use. The house was still, but it was six o'clock; he had just heard it strike in the town—his watch had been gone long since. In a few minutes his fellow-lodgers would be getting back from their stores and offices; there would be steps and laughter, and whistling and chaff. He would not wait to hear it, though; why should he imbibit the last moments by the contrast between his luck and theirs? It was sharp enough already.

He stood up and loaded. How should he do it? where should he aim? The brain was the surest. No, it need not be; he knew the vital parts elsewhere, and *that*— Once, in his rougher American experiences, Gerald had seen a man with his brains blown out; he looked now at the spot where he would fall, and saw— No; he could not bring himself to think of looking like that. The heart; that would do—as sure, and nothing too disagreeable or ungentlemanly when he should be found. He felt about for a moment, then took careful aim. His finger was on the trigger; his hand was quite steady.

The house-door banged with a tremendous crash; a half-formed bass was troling out a lively refrain in the passage; the first of Mrs. Benson's boarders had come home. A sudden blind rage was the latest emotion of which Blake was conscious; in the very act of it he fired.

“‘Attempted suicide’! Dear me, dear me, how sad! Only think, Sophy! ‘Was removed to the hospital, where he lies in a precarious condition. Grave doubts are entertained of his recovery.’ Dear, dear! and such a nice-looking, gentlemanly young man! ‘Money troubles are supposed to have been the cause of the rash act.’ Ach! to think of that, now! I suppose that must have been why he has not been near us for so long while.”

“What are you saying? Who is that you are reading about?”

Sophy held out a trembling hand across the breakfast-table for the fatal sheet. For one moment her eyes, heavy and swollen with half a night of weeping, stared at the words, dilated with a stony horror; the next, she had slipped from her chair in a dead faint.

It would have been little consolation to Gerald Blake, even if he could have known it, in the long days during which he lay hanging between life and death. Little even after the victory had declared for life, and a slow but steady recovery had set in. Spring was already in the land by the time he was able to sit out for a while every afternoon on the stoep. He knew, by then, that he had been asked after; but Mrs. Van Eyssen's cards of kind inquiry had accumulated into quite a respectable little heap long before he had been well enough to be told about them. They had been brought to him when he was still so weak that he had some ado not to actually cry with vexation; far too weak to tear them into the thousand pieces he would have desired. Why could not people let him be forgotten? This solicitude seemed all that was wanting to make him perfectly and absolutely ridiculous.

For he felt that now; and as the days went on, and brought him ever nearer to the time when he must perforce go out again into ordinary life, he felt it more and more. Sitting on the stoep on one of these sunny afternoons in the cushioned Madeira chair, staring moodily into the garden, the illustrated paper with which he had been supplied slipping from his listless grasp, his thin white hands lying nervelessly on the rug across his knees, he was feeling horribly, bitterly ashamed, not so much of his attempt as of his failure. He had been in situations before now out of which it had not been easy to come with dignity, but never in one so impossible as this. To be just where you were, with the addition of having made such a horrible fool of yourself! He called, quite pathetically, heaven and earth to witness that it was no fault of his that he was alive to-day. It was all his consistently atrocious luck. He did sincerely think it was atrocious, in the abstract. And yet, sitting there in the spring-tide, with the delicious languors of returning life creeping through him almost in his own despite, feeling, after all, deny it as he might, how good a thing and pleasant it is for the eyes to behold the sun, he was conscious of a sort of satisfaction in reflecting that not by the most depraved form of public opinion could he be reasonably expected to try the thing again.

With a sigh in which each of these emotions had its part, and in

which physical weakness went for a good deal, too, he roused himself to the extent of picking up his paper. The shadow of the first of the castor-oil shrubs along the centre walk had crawled half way to the steps; he judged it was time they should bring him his tea. From want of all other distractions, Gerald had become quite learned in this primitive form of horology. He heard steps behind him, coming through the ward, and the nurse's voice, but not addressed to him.

"Oh, yes, it will do him good. It's cheering up a little he wants more than anything else, now."

With a sudden foreboding, the reverse of cheerful, he half turned his head; even as he did so Mrs. Van Eyssen's decent black brushed against his chair, and behind Mrs. Van Eyssen came Sophy de Jongh. The color rushed into Gerald's almost transparent face, till it was as crimson as a blushing girl's; he got to his feet with difficulty, raising himself by the arms of his chair, but was compelled to sink back even before Mrs. Van Eyssen's voluble remonstrances and entreaties gave him permission to do so. The nurse brought more chairs, and the visitors sat down.

Blake sat tongue-tied, absorbed in a desperate effort to look natural and at ease, while the elder lady flowed on in a stream of words which waited for no answer—fortunately, for he did not even hear her.

How should he get rid of them? He almost wished he could faint—that wretched old woman's chatter was enough to justify an invalid in doing so—but that would have made him more conspicuous than he felt already. There was nothing for it but patience. So far as Mrs. Van Eyssen was concerned, this was rewarded soon enough—far sooner than he would have desired, when he came to see the infinitely worse behind. She stood up.

"We mustn't tire you, Mr. Blake," she said, suggestively.

Of course, Gerald was constrained to deny the possibility of their doing so; he did it with the courage of generations of traditional courtesy, without flinching.

"Not? It is true, eh?" she replied, with an innocent satisfaction in her transparent artifice for which he could gladly have strangled her. "Then, Sophy, dear, I think I will try and see poor Mrs. Ferreira. I sha'n't be longer as ten minutes, eh? You won't mind to wait so long? because she can't bear to see a new face, poor soul! You're sure you won't mind?"

She went back into the ward.

On the stoep the spring wind rustled the leaves of Gerald's paper, which had once more fallen at his feet; the voices of children came fitfully from a further wing; a couple of natives, passing to and fro with water for the garden, exchanged an ejaculatory jabber at intervals, as they met at the tap or crossed each other on the paths; at intervals, too, came the swish of the water from their cans and pails. These sounds punctuated the silence in which these two sat—a silence in which she looked at him, with her soul too plainly in her dull, wistful eyes, and he looked at the pattern on the rug, at the advertisements on the back of the paper, till he found afterwards that, though he had not been conscious of seeing either, both had burned themselves forever into his brain. Presently she spoke.

"You have been very sick," she said.

There was a sort of protest in the rather faltering tones.

"Oh, pretty well, I believe," he replied, with a grim kind of lightness. He did not look at her.

There was a pause, in which her breath came brokenly. He heard it with a pang of shame so keen it turned to anger; he was not used to feel ashamed.

"Oh!" she cried, all at once, and he did not need to see her pale face to know that the tears were in her eyes—"oh, Mr. Blake, how could you be so wicked, and so—so cruel?"

This was too horrible. What, of silence or of speech, could he think of that would most discourage her? For what was she not, on the slightest encouragement, ready to say? And she must not say it; by all his hopes of self-respect forever, she must say nothing he could not affect to misunderstand. To marry for money—there was nothing much in that; every one did it that could—but, having failed in his attack on the heiress by direct means, to have it hinted, sneered, that he had compassed his purpose by a vulgar stratagem—the stratagem of some melodramatic cad of a shop-assistant! It was not to be endured.

"Everything that is said in that way, Miss de Jongh, only makes me rather more sorry I couldn't manage it."

He spoke, on purpose, even more ungraciously than he felt; Sophy's shocked face was a grim satisfaction to him.

"You must be very wicked—or—" she added, with a ready excuse for which he was by no means grateful, "or you have been very unhappy, to make you talk like that. Were you very miserable?" she asked, plaintively.

"Not half so miserable then as I have been since, as I am now,"

he said, with sullen bitterness. "I must have been mad to think that I had come to the worst."

"Yes, that was it," she took him up, almost eagerly. "You were not in your right senses, not for a minute, and then before you knew— They say one can be like that when one is very unhappy. I don't know. I have been very unhappy too—sometimes," she added, with most undeceptive haste. "I don't think any one can ever have been more unhappy as me. But I never did feel as if I must do—*that*."

He looked at her, and laughed slightly; there was little mirth in the sound.

"I hope you never may, Miss de Jongh," he said. "And now suppose we talk of something pleasanter?"

He felt it was useless; and, in fact, his words scarcely reached her understanding. She was looking at him now with the old wistfulness, taking in every detail of his altered appearance.

"You are better?" she said; "much better? You will be quite better soon?"

"I'm afraid so."

This time she took no notice.

"When you are quite better, and come out of the hospital, what shall you do? where do you think to go?"

"Where shall I go?" he cried, with a sudden strength of fury. "If there are any ends of the earth where I shall never see a creature I ever knew or that ever knew me, I shall go there. I shall look for it anyhow."

She dropped her head, and her eyes beneath her veil.

"No, Mr. Blake," she said, almost in a whisper, "don't do that."

Confound that old woman! was she never coming back? He pretended not to have heard; he would have given worlds to think of any remark, however blankly silly, that would make a diversion. But it was a task to which his still shaken nerves and enfeebled brain were honestly unequal.

"See, Mr. Blake," she went on, "it is like this." She could not be said to speak without embarrassment; her gentle, monotonous voice was steady enough, indeed, but her eyes were cast down still, and she kept pulling nervously at the fingers of her gloves. "When it comes to death, or when one is frightened it has come to that, for one's self or for one's—one's friends, I think one often sees things differently. There are things one wishes one had left unsaid, or had

said differently ; other things that— It is strange how it opens one's eyes—death !”

She paused, and stole a slow, obviously beseeching glance at him. He would not take the slightest notice ; he sat with his hands clenched in the intensity of his annoyance, resigned to a sullen passiveness. Her confusion be upon her own head ! He had done his best to stop her and she would not be stopped, now he washed his hands of the whole affair. This was his fault, too, he supposed ? Of course ! everything was always his fault.

“ And when—when a kind Providence has heard one,” continued the poor girl, “ and mercifully spared the life one did fear for, whether one's own or some one else's—it seems as if it would be wrong and ungrateful to forget the things for which one had wished to make amends. That would be wicked ; don't you think so, Mr. Blake ?”

“ Really, Miss de Jongh,” he said, frigidly, “ I don't feel competent to say. You could scarcely have come to a worse judge about a question of morals.”

She gave him a little patient, puzzled look ; it was evident she did not understand.

“ When you spoke to me that afternoon, I did mean what I said. But I was angry. There was some one . . . a young lady . . . had been saying things . . . making me think— But she has been punished.” She spoke without a trace of personal vindictiveness, only with a simple, serious-minded satisfaction in a justified Providence. “ And I have been punished, too. When I saw it was all lies—what had been said—because you cared so much that—that—it even made you—”

She broke off suddenly. As for Gerald he fairly blushed again, burningly, painfully ; he could not help it yet. Sophy saw nothing ; she had hidden her face in her hands ; he could see by the rise and fall of her bosom that she was crying. What, in the name of all gentleness, was he to do ?

“ Oh, Mr. Blake,” she sobbed, from behind her sheltering hands, “ do be a little kind ; help me a little ! Do you think I am not ashamed ? that it is easy for a woman to say all this ?”

“ Don't, for Heaven's sake, don't cry, Miss de Jongh ! I—I—if you knew what you make me feel ! What a scoundrel, what an unutterable cad ! I shall never forgive myself all the days of my life !”

He could have cried himself, with shame and perplexity.

"It is not *my* forgiveness you ought to ask for that," she said, simply, on a sob. "And if there was anything else—anything for which you might have needed mine—I—I have forgiven you long ago."

"Forget me, then," he said, and he spoke sincerely; "forget me, Miss de Jongh. It is the kindest thing you can do for me, now. I will not add—the wisest thing for yourself; you are too generous for that to weigh with you."

She raised her head; in that moment, even in those dull eyes, one could see the pathetic love-light shining through tears.

"I—I can't be kind in that way," she said. Then she turned her head away, and almost wrung her hands. "Oh! you are cruel, cruel, to make me so ashamed!"

What could he do more? What but take her poor wet hand in his own weak white ones, and bow his head upon it, in a transport of more genuine emotion—were it only gratitude and honest shame—than he had ever yet known in his life?

"Sophy, Sophy!" he said, brokenly, "it is I that should be ashamed; I have not deserved this goodness. But since you are so forgiving—an angel of forgiveness, of compassion— If anything I can be, anything I can do; if all my life's devotion can repay you a little— Oh, Sophy, look at me, and tell me it may!"

She looked, and her face recalled the faces of certain Flemish Madonnas; transfigured with love and happiness, not into beauty, yet into something as good and more touching to look upon. She put her free hand on his; and if, in a place so public, there could be no other embrace, such was little needed to add assurance to the language of that simple action.

Half an hour later Gerald was back in bed, too much exhausted in body to be very clear in mind, yet conscious that the life which he had thought, had wished over, which he had intended should be over, had been given back to him smoothed to a Sybarite softness of luxury. The cost had been some shame, some very bitter shame; there was still much to be faced in that way. Yet he was conscious—and for once justifiably conscious—of the rectitude of his intentions. Fate had intervened as usual; and when Fate takes the form of a woman, she is clearly irresistible, and also—one's conscience being clear of all complicity—in this instance to be forgiven. He forgave Fate: more—towards Sophy, Fate's instrument, he felt genuinely touched and humbled. He vowed, and he vowed sin-

cerely, that never, never, should she have reason to regret this hour.

Perhaps she never had. Yet it is to be remembered that at that time it was still a case of "when—a certain personage was sick." Perhaps, then, she had. To all appearance, though, she was content; "happy ever after." To all appearance: Heaven only knows the secret history of some women. Perhaps Heaven, that knows it, has compensations for them even here, were it only in the gift which makes forgiveness easy—the blessed gift of an infinite, eternally renewed power of illusion and of hope.

CHAPTER XXXI

IN certain quarters the news of Mr. Solomon's arrest fell like a thunderbolt from a clear sky—so far as the sky of the I. D. B. can ever be said to be clear, which is, perhaps, not saying much. Still, all things go by comparison, and it was some considerable time, now, since anything so sensational in the way of a capture had been effected; natives, a Malay or two, and even the smaller fry among whites, did not count. There was much searching of heart among far larger operators than these; many faces grew longer than they would have cared to be seen behind the pages of the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* that morning, and the eulogium on Wronsky's skill was endorsed with much emphasis that was not benedictory.

Of them all no face, perhaps, looked blanker than Christian Dreyer's. Dreyer, hardened as a rule by long and successful practice into the cheerful indifference which he had foretold for Runciman, was yet subject to occasional panics; and this catastrophe was all that was wanted to confirm him in his resolution of over-night. As early as he could do so without exciting suspicion he went over to Jesse Runciman.

The way in which the young man took the warning—which had lost nothing by the hours during which Dreyer's fears had been growing—awakened in the canteen-keeper a dim suspicion that Westoby might have had some reason for his prohibition; that policy might have had more, and mere temper less, to do with it than he had supposed. He came away with a most discomfiting doubt as to whether he had materially improved the situation;

whether a loss of nerve so complete might not be more dangerous than even the possibilities of ignorance.

As for Jesse Runciman, thus suddenly placed between the devil and the deep sea, he passed a few days in the agony of indecision natural to such a position, and then got a note conveyed to Westoby, informing him with the courage of absolute despair that he must see him at once; if no notice was taken of this communication within twenty-four hours he should come either to the office or to Westoby's rooms, let the risk be what it might. The communication was answered within two hours, even before the writer had found coolness to regret it. Whatever might be suspected as to Westoby's temper on receiving it, nothing was to be gathered from his reply. It was curt, indeed, but not aggressively so, and bade Runciman be at Arkwright's house at eight o'clock that evening. If Westoby had not turned up by half-past, he must come away, and wait till another appointment could be given him.

This was towards the end of the afternoon; Jesse went at once and made certain preparations. For the last time! he told himself this, with something like an ecstasy of relief all the while. For the time he managed to put all fear out of sight; hugging himself in thoughts of the morrow, when he should have broken free from this bondage forever. He was almost thankful for the crisis that had worked him up to a point of courage to which no spiritual considerations had been able to bring him. To-morrow he would be safe—even more, he would be free. Oh, the peace of the days that were coming!

That his principal should have made a rendezvous of Arkwright's house was rather a surprise; but he knew from words which Sarah had let fall, almost against her will in the fulness of her heart, that Westoby was on sufficiently intimate terms with Sam to be a grief and anxiety to her; and a more accidental seeming meeting-place could scarcely have been devised. How any opportunity for private communication was to be contrived in the house of a quite uninitiated host was a matter he left to Westoby.

He took up some Dutch tracts, which Sarah had once asked for, to give color to a visit which he felt required some explanation. It was not absolutely unprecedented, but it was decidedly rare. Mattie was spending the evening with Mrs. Johnson—the least desirable of her acquaintances—of the Bazaar Committee. Mattie was out more than ever, in these days; the most fashionably detached couples could scarcely see less of each other than these two did now.

It was clear, from the surprise with which Arkwright received his visitor, that no understanding had been made with him. It was cordial surprise, however.

"Yes, the missus is out," he said, to Jesse's unspeakable relief, "gone to prayer-meeting; but you'll come in and have a yarn with me, won't you?"

He opened the door of the parlor; the room was dark and unfriendly-looking, and, as if he had made sufficient concession to conventionality, he continued,

"I say, old chap, suppose we sit in the kitchen? To tell the truth, I'm spending the evening there myself. It mayn't be so fine, but it's a long sight more comfortable."

Runciman would have sat in the cellar (had there been one) with equal indifference to his surroundings; he murmured an absent assent, and to the kitchen they went accordingly. Sam established himself again in his lately vacated chair, and resumed his interrupted pipe; he did not go through the empty form of offering his guest a luxury which he knew, with pity, he never indulged in. To show hospitality to the best of his power, he exerted himself to talk on every subject he could think of. But it was an exertion; conversation between two persons who, even when their minds are free, have scarcely an idea in common, is apt to flag after a very limited period, and in spite of Sam's best efforts silence had fallen hopelessly upon them, even before Runciman had sat for his appointed half-hour.

Jesse scarcely noticed it; for him all sound was summed up in one expected sound—that of Westoby's footstep. Only, with some sort of lower consciousness, he felt the loud measured ticking of the "Castle-of-Chillon" clock till it became a torture. Twenty minutes past; twenty-two minutes past. He thought he heard some one at the front door, and his heart gave a bound and then stood still; the fear of Westoby, which had become the ruling passion of his life, turned him sick and cold now that the crisis seemed here. It was nothing, and the clock beat on. Twenty-five minutes past; twenty-eight; and then there was a reaction. It could not be that he was not coming! that the risk, the mortal terror, of the last few days, must be endured again for so long as his tyrant might choose.

The half-hour! Sam was fidgeting in his chair, he was evidently puzzled. Runciman took no heed; he sat on doggedly. Westoby must be coming, he must—he must.

Presently Sam stood up.

"I don't want to hurry you, old chap," he said, apologetically,

"but I've got to be going to bring back the missus. She knows I don't like her to be coming home alone, and if I don't turn up she'll be a bit puzzled, so I don't like to run it too fine."

"Oh! of course; of course. I've given you a dreadful dose of my company, I'm afraid; but I was so—so comfortable, I scarcely noticed how time was going."

Certainly Westoby had something to show in that quarter for his two months' drill. Arkwright had thought his visitor's manner a little absent, he thought it now a little abrupt and startled, as was natural to one suddenly roused from thought. There was nothing to betray the anger, the terror, the despair, which were making his mind a chaos.

"Our ways lie pretty near together as far as Glover's Bar, don't they?" continued Sam; "we may as well go together as separate, it's more sociable, and I sha'n't feel so much as if I was turning you out."

He was half way to the door, when he stopped short.

"Oh, lor," he exclaimed, "I've just remembered. There's a letter about old Jobson's order that's bound to go by the first post to-morrow. It won't take above ten minutes, if you don't mind waiting a bit; if I put it off till I come back I may forget again, and then there'll be ructions."

He hurried out; Jesse was left standing in the kitchen alone. He stood with his hands clenched, and all his soul possessed with a dull rage; it was the rage of the last extremity of fear, such as for a moment gives courage for revolt. With a gesture of absolute fury he thrust his hand into an inner pocket till he felt where at the bottom lay a little box—a common snuff-box; if his physical force had been equal to the force of his passion, he could have ground both box and diamonds into powder. He *would* be free; if Westoby would not release him he would free himself, but so that he would be free indeed, as little a debtor to Westoby as to the law. Stepping softly, he opened the back door; it was locked, but the key turned easily, he could detect no noise. He went down the step into the half yard, half garden. The night was cloudy and dark; there was a smell of rain in the air. He crept along near the corrugated iron fence, peering into the night. At a certain spot he dropped on his knees, and began to feel about in the darkness. Against the paling the ground had lately been dug up for a border; it was still soft, and here only a small strip was left uncovered between the fence and a double tier of tins in which bulbs were growing—some of the bulbs Sarah had brought from Beulah.

Nothing could be safer. With a caution which had become a second nature in every detail connected with this side of his life, Runciman took his knife, to avoid, as far as possible, any stain on his hands, and began to scratch up the soil behind the tins. He opened the box. When Westoby should come to fetch his property, there should be nothing that his utmost ingenuity of malice could use to his agent's hurt. He scrambled the diamonds up into three or four little packets in the usual lead-foil; there were so many the material barely sufficed. He dropped them into the little grave; covered them up dark and deep; strewed some bits of rubbish upon the place, rose, brushed the dust from his clothes, and went back.

Free! The sullen rage of five minutes since had given place to a sullen joy; he scarcely knew why it burned lurid, not clear. He sat down and waited, and in his heart was neither remorse nor shame, only an impatient longing for Arkwright's return, that he might leave the sooner the most hateful spot on earth.

There was not much conversation on the way. At Victoria Crescent they parted company.

"We shall have rain to-night, I fancy," said Arkwright, by way of a farewell.

"Perhaps," said Runciman, "but it has looked like this for several evenings."

"Well, good-night, old chap."

"Good-night."

And so they parted, who should meet but once more on earth; a thing as little in their thought as it was how and where that meeting should be.

Jesse went on along Dutoitspan Road; the night was heavy and dark, almost warm suddenly, after sharp cold; all round the horizon the blackness was rent and palpitating continually with the wide, slow, silvery-blue illumination of the sheet-lightning. Yes; there would be rain.

It did not come yet, though. It did not come till many hours later; not till, at length, in both townships, most men slept. Jesse slept, and forgot for a while the sin he knew, and the meanness he had scarcely realized. Sam slept; there was nothing much for which he felt the need of oblivion. Only Sarah awakened with the noise. She lay and listened to the thunder of falling waters upon the iron roof, to the hissing rush of falling waters, filling all the air; she breathed a prayer for all the unsheltered of the earth, and turned again to sleep.

It rained and rained; it was as if the windows of heaven had been opened. The roads were running down as watercourses; water, ankle-deep, spread itself in ever-widening lakes in every hollow, tore in a yellow torrent down every sluice, tossing and gurgling over the rocky bed which it had bared for itself. It was a very carnival of waters. For three hours it rained; then it ceased as suddenly as it had begun. An hour later the dawn was brightening in a clear sky, and Sam was on his way to the shops.

The sun rose and brightened. Sarah, going about her work, stood for a moment on the back doorstep to feel the resurrection beauty of the new day. In the yard next theirs, a woman was standing at a wash-tub, fowls were pecking about in the sunshine, a little child, just able to run and talk, was toddling after them with gushes of shrill baby-laughter. Even as Sarah looked, it sat down with the sudden collapse natural to its age, and began grubbing about with unskilled fingers in the sand. The sun made a glory about its little fair head; she could not choose but linger and look a moment. The next it had scrambled up again; she saw it trotting towards its mother, holding up some wonderful treasure in its chubby hand, its tongue tripping over words which mothers only could interpret. Sarah turned back into the house, then; would there ever be some one to run to her with tales and treasures? When she next chanced to raise her eyes in passing, both woman and child were gone.

The morning passed; at mid-day Sam came home to dinner.

"Can you bring back a piece of tin this evening, Sam?" said his wife, as they sat down. "There's a hole in the fence just behind the tins where my bulbs are (the rain has brought them on so nicely); and now the chickens are just out next door, I'm afraid of their getting into our place; the hole is quite big enough for that."

"All right," said Sam, "I'll see to it. It's their job by rights, not mine; but sooner than have 'em always poking about my premises after their blessed chickens, I'll do it myself. It may be the fashion here for folks to live half their time in their neighbors' houses and yards, but I don't hold with their prying and ferreting about mine."

He spoke with some irritation. In fact, he had not come back in the best of tempers. He had not yet quite got accustomed to the annoyances unavoidably incident to a return to a subordinate position, and his master, an excellent, but rather fidgety and dour old Scotchman, was not the person to make the situation easier.

They were about half through dinner when there came a knock at the front door. Sam jumped up angrily.

"If it's one of those Indian fellows again," he said, "I shall just set the dogs at him. Can't a chap even have his meals in peace?"

He went out, banging the glass half-door behind him. Sarah heard the front-door open, and almost simultaneously men's steps entering; then a man's voice, a sharp question from Sam, an angry laugh, a reply in the first voice. Then the door was flung open, and Sam appeared, closely followed by three strangers—white men. If these had anything to say Sam gave them no chance.

"Here's a nice go!" he exclaimed, wrathfully. "Here's these parties swearing that some old fool of a magistrate has sent 'em up here with a search-warrant—for *my* premises! But I'll see 'em further first, warrant or no warrant. I'll not stand—"

"Now, my man," said the spokesman, "there's no sort of use in going on like that. We've got to do it, and you've got to let us."

"Oh! have I?" retorted Sam. "We'll see about that."

"Sam, dear!"

Sarah had risen on the entrance of the detectives. With every atom of color vanished from her face, with something in her expression which went beyond the shock and confusion natural in the circumstances, she stood beside her husband, one hand on his shoulder, the other laid imploringly on his breast; and all that her eyes said in that moment not one present could fully understand. "Sam, dear, don't, don't make things—worse!"

He paused a moment, boiling over with indignation though he was, unwilling to shake her off or to answer her roughly. The detective who seemed to be the leader spoke again.

"Yes, you may as well begin with the yard," he said; and the other two passed out through the kitchen, closing the back door behind them.

"You must both please to stay where you are," he continued, as Sam, suddenly realizing what was happening, made a start as if to follow them. And with an amazed feeling of powerlessness he stopped.

There followed a pause. Sarah had sat down again, in the place whence she had risen from her unfinished meal; instinctively she had turned her chair a little towards the kitchen door. She sat very still, her eyes fixed in the same direction. The detective had sat down also, in a position from which he could command a view of both of them. Arkwright chose to remain standing; he stuck his hands in his pockets, and did his best to keep an appearance of that ease which was deserting him each moment, as he felt that every

movement he made, every point to which he turned his eyes, was coming under the notice of the man who sat there showing no symptom of any watchfulness at all. Sam had never dreamed it could be so difficult to know where to look.

With every second he became more intensely self-conscious, more unreasonably nervous. He began to fidget, making little, aimless steps hither and thither, to whistle—and broke off, against his will, after a few notes; now and then he laughed, a little, angry, unnatural sound.

They could hear sounds at last from the yard; a clattering of metal; three or four heavy thuds. Sam's temper rose again; once more he made for the door, and again the detective called him back. He stood irresolute, muttering angrily, and by no means inaudibly.

Was a fellow to have his place turned upside down, and not have any say in the matter? How did he know what those chaps were up to? they might be putting things in themselves.

Sarah made a little, involuntary movement. He noticed it, saw her forehead contract a little, as with some more intolerable pain, and felt ashamed of his childishness.

The noise without had ceased; a few minutes later the two detectives came back. The man on guard rose; if any sign passed between the three, it was not discoverable.

"Finished outside?" he said. "You take charge here, then, Smith, for a bit. Johnson can go on with the house."

He turned to Sam.

"You must come with me," he said; "I have orders to search you."

Arkwright stared incredulously, then he defied any man living to lay a finger on him, and finally, of course, went off. In about twenty minutes he came back; he flung himself into a chair, muttering snatches of mingled threats and sarcasms. Then Sarah got up from where she had been sitting—her head bowed, her face hidden in her hands, and came across to him; and because she was trembling too much to stand, she drew a chair beside his, sitting down very close to him, and took his hands in her cold ones, and began to fondle them as she might have done to Mattie. She did not open her lips; she had not done so from the first.

Johnson passed through the room and made a sign to the other, who followed him out. In a minute or two the front door opened and shut again; the first man had left the house.

Another long pause. All this time neither husband nor wife knew

in the least what had happened, whether or no anything had been found. Sam began to get confused, even, with the long strain, the ignorance of what it all meant, and the evident conviction of the officials that it did mean something. He felt as if it was even possible that they might have found what his reason told him could not be there to find. If all this was possible, anything was possible. He did not bluster any more, now; he sat nearly as still as Sarah, very sulky, very angry, and, at bottom, getting frightened without knowing why.

It might have been half an hour that they had been sitting there; the clock in the kitchen had just struck two when the front door opened again. Sam looked up instinctively with a forlorn wonder as to what was to happen next. Above the half-blind over the glass door he could see his original guard, in company with a considerably older man and with a woman.

Sam knew Chief Detective Hewitt by sight, and not even conscious innocence could save his nerves—severely tried with an hour and a half of mystery and annoyance—a certain shock. In fact, by this time he was beginning to lose his head dangerously.

Johnson was searching in the bedroom; he came to the door, spoke a little with Hewitt, and went back again. The woman, at a sign from the chief, went into the parlor; the other two came on into the dining-room. Smith, still on guard, stood up when they came in; the others instinctively did the same. There was a sense that the crisis had come.

The first thing the new-comer did was to order Mrs. Arkwright into the parlor, where the female searcher was waiting. He spoke in a voice of the merest officialism; the suggestion of his personality was rather kindly than otherwise; but it was little the poor girl perceived it. Her fortitude gave way; she burst into tears, and sank down again on the chair, incapable, for a moment, of obeying. The next, the outburst of Sam's indignation brought her to herself.

"Don't—don't, dear," she sobbed. "Oh, sir, don't take any heed of what he says. I'm—I'm going."

And she went out, weeping bitterly. Hewitt watched her into the room; then he turned to Arkwright.

By this time Sam was thoroughly frightened. The common-sense which his prejudice against the Department could not quite obscure, told him that such extreme measures would never have been taken without some very serious justification. Yet the shock was

tremendous when the chief detective, having cautioned him in due form, went on :

"These were found buried in your yard; in the border against the left-hand fence. Do you know anything about them?"

Sam stared at the four little packets lying, half-opened, in the detective's palm. He turned hot and cold; every horrible story of miscarriage of justice he had ever heard seemed to flash into his mind in that one instant of time. He lost his head completely.

"It's some beastly trick!" he burst out, desperately; "or—or they must have been left by the party that had the house before." At the same moment he remembered that he himself had made that particular border barely six weeks ago. "I mean—" he stammered, broke off, and ended with the sullenness of despair, "I don't know anything about them."

After that he resigned himself, with an angry, hopeless resignation. He heard that he was arrested with comparative indifference; there was nothing else to be expected now. He sat down and closed his eyes; when he opened them again it was on the entrance of his wife.

Sarah also was under arrest; but it was not this that had put the strange new misery into her face. That had been born at the moment when she in her turn had been shown the diamonds. She had kept her presence of mind far better than Sam, merely denying any knowledge of them, but it was then that the look of the heart-stricken had come into her eyes—her eyes that had dried suddenly.

It never left them, nor was it ever turned away from Sam. He was aware of it all through the horrible silent drive to the police-station; it was the last thing he saw when, at length, they were led away in opposite directions. He could not read its language, yet it haunted him strangely, even among many more urgent anxieties, through the long, slow dragging of the remainder of the day—through the restless night. He could not hear the meaning, moaned out in words upon her knees.

"Oh, Sam, Sam! Why must it have taken all this to make me know I had begun to love you? and why must I have begun to love you only to know that you are a thief?"

CHAPTER XXXII

"HAVE you heard the news, Jesse?" In her excitement, Mattie spoke more naturally and cordially than she had done for weeks. "Mrs. Johnson was here this afternoon and she told me; it's making such a talk all over Kimberley, she says. It's Mr. Arkwright; he's in such a dreadful scrape. Fancy! You know that rain we had, night before last? Well, yesterday morning the people next door found a couple of diamonds in their yard—big ones—and they took them to the police-station right off, and the police came up to see the place, and it looked just as if they must have been washed out of Mr. Arkwright's yard—there was a hole in the fence, and Mrs. Johnson says you could see the marks quite plain where the earth had been washed down; and they sent and had this place searched, and they found, oh! a most awful lot of diamonds—hundreds of pounds' worth, Mrs. Johnson says; but we shall see all that in the paper to-morrow, because he was had up before the magistrate this morning, yes, and Sarah, too—fancy, poor Sarah! But the magistrate said there was no evidence against her (I should think not, indeed!), so he discharged her; but Mr. Arkwright was committed for trial to the Special Court, and I don't know quite when that sits next, but Mrs. Johnson heard it would be in about ten days or a fortnight; and isn't it awful? Poor Sarah! I must go up and see her first thing to-morrow. Why, Jesse, what's the matter?"

He stood holding on to the edge of the table with both hands, and even so she could see how he was trembling. Suddenly he turned and took a step or two.

"My hat," he said, in a bewildered sort of way; "where is my hat? I must go."

"What? is it Sarah you're going to see? It won't be any kindness to go to-night. Poor thing! most likely she's in bed by now; I'm sure I hope so, after all she's gone through. And, anyhow, you'll not have time before your class, not even if you miss your tea."

He stared at her.

"What are you talking about?" he said. "My class? What o'clock is it?"

He spoke in the same bewildered way as before.

"Oh, dear me," she said, sharply; "one is really afraid to tell you anything, you put yourself in such a state directly. Where's the use? It isn't likely you're half as sorry as I am, that have known her pretty near as long as I've known anything, but you don't see me going on like that!"

"You!" he cried, with a sudden fierceness. "You haven't any heart at all; you're just glad to have something to talk about; you'd comfort yourself for her funeral, if you could have the fussing over it! You! you! Oh! go away; can't you see you're driving me mad?"

"Well! I'm sure," retorted Mattie, in much indignation. "I'm going—I suppose you know tea is ready; you can have it when you choose to come for it."

"That's the sort of thing he's always saying to me now," she muttered, as she went down the passage. "I don't know what's come over him. Perhaps Sarah's right, and he really is ill; but what can I do? he only flies out at me if I ask. If he won't take proper food or get himself proper clothes, this weather, he must expect to be ill. Well! I sha'n't wait for him."

But though she sat down to the table somewhat defiantly and helped herself, the meal was rather a poor pretence. Mattie was not so heartless as he had said, though it is true her heart was not particularly troubled about him. Not much, even when it became clear that he did not mean to join her at all, for she heard him leave the house.

"Oh, well, he has remembered his class," she thought. "He is starting very early for that, though."

But he had not gone to his class; half blind and dazed, actually stumbling now and then as he went, he was making his way to Dreyer's canteen.

Dreyer was sitting in the room behind the bar, comfortably studying a dirty copy of the *Police News*, when Jesse came in; the first glance was enough to make him throw down the sheet, and to drive away his lately recovered expression of general content.

"*Allemagtig!*" he exclaimed, pushing back his chair, "what has happened? You ought not to be coming here now, and looking like this. Did any one see you?"

It chanced that no one had, but Jesse cared as little as he knew.

"Tell me it isn't true!" he gasped. "You haven't heard anything. It's all those old women's lies. Arkwright—it isn't possible—*Arkwright*—" He shuddered from head to foot.

"Ach! is that all?" said Dreyer, with immense relief. "Yes—*de arme kerel*—they've got him; sure enough. All that about so great quantity of stuff will be just talk, of course; how can he get it together in the time—a new hand, and no capital? No; it will just have been three or four stones—not worth the risk, poor chap."

But Jesse had heard nothing beyond the first words.

"Then it's all over," he said, with a sudden desperate sort of calm. "And I'm glad. It will be better than this. Where ought I to go? To the police-station? To the resident magistrate?"

He pressed his hand to his head.

"It aches so," he said, "and seems to be going round. I sha'n't be able to tell it all clear; but they will understand. They won't think me mad, will they? or even if they do—"

Dreyer had sat staring at him with a mixture of fear and perplexity which bordered on the ludicrous.

"I don't know what they'll think," he said, resignedly, "whoever they may be. But I'm blessed if I don't think you're off your head. Whatever are you talking about? It's nothing to do with any of us. I never knew the fellow was in the trade at all; likely he never was, not rightly to say so—it will just have been a bit of amateur business, you'll see. What in all the world has it to do with you?"

"With me?" echoed Jesse, still with that startling, vague-eyed calm. "Why, it *is* me. I put the things there myself, Tuesday night."

For the first moment Dreyer really did think that the young man's brain had given way. The next, his guilty conscience gave him, in a flash, an only too clear account of the situation and of his own responsibility for it. He turned a sickly white and began pouring out invocations, in Dutch, of all the powers of heaven.

"All the Baas's stuff!" he groaned, in the same language; the emergency was quite beyond English; "and gone like that!"

This, which was naturally to the canteen-keeper the most important part of the case, had not, as yet, to do him justice, occurred to Jesse. Even now it did not seem to affect him; probably his mind was not clear enough to take it in; he was, indeed, frightfully overwrought. Now he only stared at Dreyer as he had stared at Mattie.

"Good-by," he said, putting out his hand in an aimless sort of

way. "I'm going to give myself up. You'll see all about it in the paper to-morrow. She said so."

Then he put out both hands, and staggered a little, and Dreyer got him down into a chair.

"For the love of Heaven, Mr. Runciman," he pleaded, "don't go and do anything in a hurry. See, we're both of us in the worst sort of hole—I know that; but don't you go doing anything in a hurry as might make things worse. Have a bit of patience," he went on, soothingly, laying his hand on the young man's arm, "and we'll find some way out of the mess for you and me, and the other chap too. (Though I'm blessed if I know what it can be," he added, mentally.) "See, I'm sorry to have got you into such a scrape, it is true I am" (and so he was, neither altogether selfishly nor unselfishly). "I'm sorry I ever had any hand in this job from the first. I don't hold with the Baas's sort of bullying. If I'd known how you would feel about things, I don't know but what I'd have stood out of it altogether; I don't know but what I would."

He was not at all clever enough to have calculated on the effect of this address; he simply felt that he had no authority he could assert, and yet that his confederate must be stopped at any price. But he could have chosen no wiser line of action. It was weeks since any one—who knew—had spoken to Jesse with even decent kindness; now even this much gentleness was too much for him. He broke into a terrible fit of crying, and Dreyer felt, instinctively, that the worst was over. Presently, however, he began to fear he might be heard; now that the relief had come the young man seemed absolutely incapable of checking his sobs. Dreyer looked longingly at the chiffonier.

"He told me not," he muttered; "but it's in for a penny, in for a pound, so far as that goes, now; I can't put my foot in it much worse than I've done already. I don't believe it can hurt, for once. He can't go to his prayer-meeting like this, and I daren't let him miss it."

He took courage from despair; in a minute or two he was holding to Runciman's lips a mixture whose strength he had proportioned, with some misgivings, to the patient's incapacity, and Jesse, scarcely conscious, drank it down. The result seemed to justify Dreyer in his disobedience; in half a minute the worst of the paroxysm was over; Jesse looked up and made an effort to pull himself together.

"That's right," said Dreyer, "now we can look at things a little better. You've no call to worry yourself like this. Bless you! it's

nothing to be remanded to the Special Court. Lots of times the cases don't come on after all, and if they do that's not to say he'll be convicted. The magistrates don't dare do too much discharging themselves, but as often as not the chaps they send up are acquitted. You'll see that's how it 'll be with him."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it," said Dreyer, audaciously. "Any fool must see it's an impossible charge, on the face of it; he couldn't have done it, not with the best will in the world. No; you'll see it 'll just be smuggled over. Likely he'll have to leave Kimberley, but there's no great harm in that. And for the rest you may make your mind easy; there's no one has any notion about you, after all. It was all that ass Heinemann. Only this morning he comes smirking up to me, says he must have been a bit drunk that night—a bit! he must have been as drunk as an owl—had seen and spoken to the very chap since, and it wasn't Wronsky at all."

"Then I did it all for nothing," said Jesse, despondently rather than bitterly.

"You couldn't have known; no one could have counted on such beastly luck as that. And I tell you, you haven't done any great harm yet, anyhow."

Emboldened by success, he persuaded Jesse to finish his dose, under the pretence of medicine, made him bathe his eyes as best he could, and sent him off. Left alone, he sank back into his chair and groaned.

"Nothing much yet!" he echoed himself, bitterly. "And the Baas to be reckoned with!"

Yet heavy though that reckoning was likely to be, he felt he could almost have welcomed the worst of Westoby's wrath to have had the benefit of his direction. But just at this crisis he was away. Before daybreak on the morning of that fatal Wednesday he had started for Klerksdorp, to see after the affairs of a branch of his business in that village; it was the pressure of work consequent on his coming absence that had prevented his keeping his appointment with Jesse. Dreyer knew nothing of the probable date of his return. He could only hope that he had pacified Runciman sufficiently to keep him quiet at least till the result of the trial should be known. After that he could foresee nothing.

He saw no more of the young minister during the next fortnight. Jesse, in fact, was playing much the same waiting game as Dreyer himself. Whether or not he was convinced at heart by the canteen-

keeper's hopeful suggestions, he acted as though he were—or rather refrained from acting. Having failed to do the right thing at once, he found it no easier when it came to second thoughts. Morning after morning he rose—there was little question of sleeping in these days—trying to persuade himself that before the day was out he should hear that the affair had been somehow “smuggled over.” And when hopefulness failed him, as it failed him constantly, or when his misery of conscience became too great to be borne, he had learned a way of sustaining hope and of forgetting conscience, which Dreyer was as far from guessing as he had been from anticipating it.

Demoralized though he had become, it is still probable that even under tolerably severe stress of temptation Jesse would not, in full consciousness, have broken his pledge. But when he realized, the next morning, that without his will, so to say, he had broken it anyhow, all following steps were comparatively easy. The memory of the almost magical effect of Dreyer's potion came back to him with the first attack of misery, and he scarcely attempted resistance. Unfortunately he had the means at hand. A bottle of French brandy, bought once for some case of sickness among his flock, was under lock and key in his study. He took to that. It must be owned that he was tolerably careful; but a week sufficed to reduce him to a dependence on this remedy, which he by no means realized himself. And, of course, it was not a taste that remained stationary.

But of all this Dreyer suspected nothing. When, on the night after the trial, it did come upon him, it was as a revelation. He could think of little else as he sat the long hours through, too much dispirited even to drink, listening to sounds dying out one by one, till the midnight stillness settled down upon everything, till not even the bark of a dog was heard any more, nor the rattle of the most belated cart.

It was the small hours of the morning; he dropped asleep in his chair at times, but anxiety would not allow him any long space of slumber. He woke continually, with the feeling that his fear had come upon him—the fear of the dawn. Then he would rise and go to the window, and peer cautiously through the side of the thick cretonne curtain, to see if the sky paled. But it was still all blackness of darkness—the thick darkness before day—when, far away at first, but taken up nearer and nearer, the dogs began to bark again, and steadily through the fitful clamor, from the road towards the border, came the measured beating of a horse's hoofs. A trooper

in the mounted police, perhaps, or a doctor returning from some outlying farm. The half-roused dogs had barked themselves into silence, now; the hoof-beats came nearer, were passing, stopped, and two or three strokes as from a whip-handle came at the side door.

There was only one man that it could be, and little as Dreyer desired to see him he dared not refuse to answer the summons. He brought no light to the door; it was only as a black mass that he discerned Westoby, as he threw himself from his horse, and with a gesture of some weariness stepped into the passage. There it was darker still; only a strip of light shone from under the closed door of the room Dreyer had just left.

"I didn't know you were back," said the canteen-keeper; his voice trembled a little. "Has anything happened?"

"That's what I've been riding fifteen hours on end to find out," said Westoby. "How do you come to be up still?"

There was a certain suspicion in his tone, yet he suspected nothing definite; only just then all life seemed beset by causes for suspicion.

"I scarcely expected to make you hear," he continued, without waiting for an answer. "If you had not come at once I should have gone on, and chanced it till morning, though a deal less than five hours may make all the difference at times. But I hope matters ain't come to that pass yet?"

His tone put a question.

"No; oh, bless you, no," muttered Dreyer. The darkness might have been a blaze of light for all the concealment it afforded to his disquietude. "Nor likely to."

"You seem in a blessed funk if that's so," returned Westoby, and Dreyer felt his eyes in his voice. He leaned his back against the door, stretching out his legs in front of him; he was weary, indeed, yet it was the anxiety rather than the exertion of those fifteen hours that was telling upon him.

"I stopped at a roadside house for tiffin, just before noon," he said, "and there I stumbled on a paragraph in a ten days' old *Friend of the Free State*, that brought me along right off. I reckon you know what it was. Let's have the yarn straight, will you?"

"There's not much of it. They found stuff buried in Arkwright's garden, and run him in; and to-day he got three years. They let him off easy because of his previous good character."

"And the interesting revelations they said were expected?"

"Oh! that—that will be just newspaper rot."

Westoby flicked his riding-whip impatiently against the wainscot.

"Why can't you tell me the truth, you fool, when you know I can get it from any one?"

"Well, 'twasn't likely, by the quantity, he'd got the stuff together himself, nor it didn't seem likely it could have come there so on purpose like without his knowing about it, anyway; and being as you had gone out of your way to get so hand-and-glove with him, they thought it was you, and I reckon they hoped he'd split."

Westoby was silent a moment, and to Dreyer every moment was a respite.

"When was this stuff found?" he asked.

"On the afternoon of the fourth."

"I see," said Westoby.

Dreyer could hardly believe that there was no more to come, yet of fury in that respect no more came. Suddenly Westoby drew himself up.

"How have you kept that young fool quiet?" he asked.

"Oh! I—I managed somehow."

His knees were trembling under him.

"Was he in court to-day?"

"No, he was sick; his head was so sore he could not get up till quite late this afternoon."

"Have you seen him since?"

"No."

But even as he spoke he could not restrain the nervous sidling movement by which he would have masked the room-door.

"Liar!" said Westoby.

He made one stride and flung open the door. The atmosphere was stifling with spirits, paraffine, and general closeness. A lamp was burning on the chiffonier; in the centre of the room, head and arms fallen prone upon the table before him, sat Jesse Runciman, in the heavy sleep of intoxication.

Westoby gave Dreyer a look which turned the canteen-keeper sick; it was such as the victim might see on the face of the murderer, the last thing he sees on earth. He lifted his whip and struck out once with the butt end, blindly; Dreyer stepped back just in time to escape the full force of the blow, but the arm, instinctively raised, which caught it fell powerless by his side. It was not repeated. From the corner to which he had crept he was witness of a struggle with passion almost as terrible as unbridled rage. For a

few moments the strong man seemed to shake under it; then he had his devil in hand again.

He went up to Runciman and shook him by the shoulder. The young man had so far slept off the effects of drink that under that terrible grip he woke enough to open his eyes in a moment's bewildered stare. Westoby turned to Dreyer, who still stood cowering at the farthest possible distance.

"He is coming round," he said, briefly. "Go and get something to bring him to enough to get home before daybreak."

Dreyer hurried off; Westoby unloosed Runciman's collar with no gentle hand, and dashed some water over his head and face, and, with two or three sobbing sighs, he began to come back to some dull perception of unfathomable misery and shame. But with all that could be done, it was fully half an hour before he was sufficiently recovered to be able to leave; a distant cock was already saluting the yet unborn day. Westoby in his turn went to the window and looked out. All was still and lonely; a dying moon was fading wanly in a sky pallid as yet with the death of night rather than with the birth of morn.

"It seems clear," he muttered. "Now," he went on, turning sharply to Jesse, "you be off; go right home, and be thankful I got here in time."

Beyond the first feeble mutterings of returning consciousness, Jesse had not hitherto spoken a word; now he broke out with a sort of cry.

"I can't go home. How can I? What am I to say?"

"Am *I* to make up a story for you?" said Westoby, bitterly. "Find out for yourself what to say; I reckon you know how as well as I do by now. It ain't the first time, is it?"

Jesse turned to go.

"You will meet me at the heaps, back of the cemetery, at four o'clock this afternoon. Do you hear, and understand?" he added, roughly, laying his hand on the young man's arm.

"Yes," said Jesse, sullenly. He did not promise obedience; it was scarcely necessary.

Westoby opened the house-door for him; Dreyer, scared and cowed, durst make no move. When it was closed and locked behind the young man, Westoby came back into the room, and, like the king of old, the very fashion of his countenance was changed. He turned upon Dreyer.

CHAPTER- XXXIII

A MONTH had passed since the prison gates had closed upon Samuel Arkwright, and by the world at large he and his case had long since been forgotten. For the world at large those gates are but a stone's-throw farther from Lethe than are the gates of the grave; a month is all too long a time to fill with the memory of the captive or of the dead.

But Samuel Arkwright's wife, standing at the door of Runciman's house waiting for her knock to be answered, was musing of the meaninglessness of all measures of time; so age-like did that month lie behind her, yet so inappreciable a fraction of the time he must live through still.

Her heart was full to overflowing of an infinite pity for him, of yearning over him, yet it was not love, or at least, only such as pity would have waked in her, for the weakest and the worst. But till his day of trouble, she had scarcely given him so much as this; she may well have taken it—so unlearned was she in the ways of love—for more and other than it was.

The night was heavy and close, there was thunder in the air. Even as Jesse Runciman opened the door, a swift blue javelin of lightning lit up the dark behind her; a far, faint muttering ended the pause before she actually entered the house.

"Yes, I knew Mattie was at the river," she said, in answer to a statement by which he faintly hoped to save himself; "but if you are not very busy, Mr. Runciman, I should so like to speak to you."

He bent his head in silence. It was dark in the passage; he could allow himself, for a moment, the look of wild fear of the coming torture which prudence, not pride, forbade him in the light. Even in a look, now, there was something of the relief of a cry. The next minute he had brought a lamp into the little parlor and had schooled his face.

Sarah sat down by the table; her hands were clasped on her lap beneath the long cloak, which, together with her plain dark bonnet, gave her something of a conventual appearance. Yet the face which

she turned to his was not the face of a nun—far less so than it had been at Marston. Many things had come into it since then, things many and strange and of which she could give no clear account to herself, and there was more to come. The face of a saint it would be always, the face of a nun never again.

"It is so seldom I can see you alone now, Mr. Runciman," she began; "I think never once since this trouble happened. And there are things one can't well say before others—not even before my Mattie; I shouldn't feel it to be doing right by him, by my husband. But I may say them to you—to a minister. I ought. And the time is getting short. They are going to send some—" she paused a moment, then went on, low but firmly, "some of the convicts down to Cape Town, next Thursday, and Sam is to be one."

She spoke with lowered eyes; when she raised them, as she ended, his face startled her for a moment out of the consideration of her own troubles. They never clung so closely about her heart as to stifle thought for those of others.

"You look very ill," she said. "You should spare yourself more, even for the sake of those for whom you labor."

"I am not sick," he said, with a touch of the irritability Mattie had noticed in him. Then he wondered why he had repudiated a suggestion which was his best defence. "That is to say, my head aches," he added. "There is nothing much in that; it mostly aches nowadays." He forced a sufficiently ghastly smile.

"I was afraid it did," she said, a little anxiously. "I know how gladly you will both spend and be spent in the work of the ministry. But, indeed, I feel it would be selfish in me to put more upon you than you have already, only that it may be the salvation of a soul." All at once she covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, Mr. Runciman," she broke out, "I am very unhappy."

"The Lord comfort you, sister," he said, faintly.

"God bless you for your sympathy," she answered, gratefully. "I wouldn't mind the disgrace—no, I ought not to say that; I should. It is part of the punishment, one ought to mind it. But if I could see that all this was being blest to his soul, I could bear it—oh! I could almost welcome it. But to feel that he is refusing the chastening of the Lord, that he is hardening his heart, justifying himself even now—!"

"Human justice miscarries sometimes, sister." He forced the words through his white lips. "What if he were innocent?"

"Ah, brother," she said, with a keener pang of pain, "you mean

it well, but don't *you* begin to prophesy smooth things unto me. Innocent? yes, they tell me he couldn't have done it himself—I don't know how that may be—but, 'When thou sawest a thief then thou consentedst with him'; how can I forget that? And he never felt it to be sin, he never did, and till he does how can all the suffering in the world cleanse his stain? My heart is breaking for his soul's sake, and I can do nothing—I have no power with him any more—the Lord deliver me from blood-guiltiness when He maketh inquisition, for surely at my hands he will require my husband's soul!"

She spoke with a passion such as no anguish short of spiritual could have stirred in her.

"That is why I came to you, brother. I was looking for great things to do—oh, the fancies I used to have at Marston!—and the work that lay to my hand I neglected, and I am punished. But you—the Lord found you faithful in that which was least, and He has given you much. You have power over souls; Sam's must not be lost because I have failed. Go to him, plead with him, show him his sin; and may the word of the Lord in your mouth be as a fire, keener than any two-edged sword—oh! it will hurt him, it will hurt, but don't spare for that. He will bless you for it some day, the day when you stand before the throne and say, 'Behold me and the children whom Thou hast given me.'"

He had pushed back his chair at the word which bade him go; he sat staring at her with such eyes of bewildered horror as gaze upon sudden death. She did not see, for hers were drowned in tears.

"They will allow it," she went on. "Every one has been so kind to me, all along—done all they could for me; and you a minister. Oh, brother, you will go?"

"God forbid!"

The ejaculation broke from him almost against his will, and though he did actually voice the syllables, it was in a tone so low and hoarse it scarcely needed the roar of the nearing storm to drown it. The words had scarcely died upon his lips before the fear that she had heard them mastered every other fear. She had not; she was asking him to fix a day for his visit. He appointed the following Tuesday—one day did as well to name as another when he had no intention of going at all. Her tearful eyes found a faint gleam wherewith to thank him.

"The Lord reward you, brother," she sobbed.

And Jesse, sick with fear and shame to his heart's core, did not doubt of his reward.

Her face hidden in her hands, Sarah sat and silently wept her troubled heart into stillness. Jesse sat no less motionless; the pain in his temples and, as it were, about the roots of his brain throbbed and burned till it seemed beyond what could be borne and consciousness retained; yet not for one moment did he lose the power of realizing a mental agony to which even the physical suffering was but as an harmonious background. There was no sound in all the room except the ever-nearing storm. Presently Sarah raised her head. Her tears had ceased to flow, and she looked more like herself.

"Will you pray with me, brother, before I go?—for me and for him? Oh, the comfort of being able to ask that! I have wrestled so long alone, but now—'if two of you shall agree together concerning anything that ye ask'— Surely the blessing will come now."

He had been sitting with his hand over his eyes; he bent his head without removing them. At the sign she sank on her knees and did not see the look on the face momentarily uncovered as he stood up—the look of a lost soul. He knelt down; he would go through with it now, he must. But he had miscalculated his nerve. He strove for speech, it would not come; the seconds of silence seemed lengthening out to hours. He pressed his hands over his eyes, and horrible, many-colored flames lit up the darkness, and wheeled and swam slowly like live things, and an urgent, inarticulate humming and whirring in his ears seemed to proceed from these. His heart now leaped convulsively and again stood still; his life seemed to be sinking down through unfathomable vacuum into annihilation. Through the void and the dizziness and the blackness, he yet at last forced some word of invocation.

"Oh, Lord," he said; and again, "Oh, Lord—"

And then the effort of speech let loose the pent-up hysteria. With a smothered sound, half gasp, half cry, he somehow struggled to his feet and staggered a few paces to the couch, where he sank down.

"No!" he panted, "I—I can't. I didn't mean—I—I'll tell everything—only spare me a little—not like this—not to go down quick into hell!"

He was shaken from head to foot with a convulsive shivering, his breath came in sobbing gasps, but he found no tears such as had

come to his relief in the canteen; there was no place for them in the wild terror that possessed him. Between conscience and the weakness of failing health he did honestly think that that mortal faintness had meant death.

He closed his eyes again for a moment, though he was feeling better already; when he opened them it was to see Sarah bending over him, asking anxiously what had happened.

He passed his hand across his brow.

"I thought I was dying," he said, in a confused, dreamy sort of way. Then, "What have I said?" he asked, with a sudden terror, but he was not asking her. "Well!" he continued, with a fresh access of horror-stricken agitation, "I couldn't help it. He must kill me, now, if he likes, but I couldn't! It was tempting the Lord—and I couldn't, I couldn't die like that, with a blasphemy— A little time for repentance; I must have that; oh, it can't be too late!"

His eyes, dilated with terror, were fixed almost unconsciously on the face of the woman before him, as if he would wrest an answer of mercy by main force. All at once the look changed; as though drawn by some irresistible power he rose suddenly, though every limb was trembling, and stared towards the door. On the threshold stood Thomas Westoby.

A peal of thunder had drowned both his knock and the sound of his entrance. Now he took a step or two forward into the room. He seemed to have been caught by the storm unawares, for his clothes, unprotected by any overcoat, were sodden with wet, as was also the soft, shapeless felt hat which he did not trouble himself to remove; drops hung on his thick, grizzled beard, and glistened even on his shaggy eyebrows, contracted almost to meeting in a heavy frown. His hands were fiercely clenched, but he was making a violent effort to keep his temper.

"Now, then, young man," he said, "perhaps you'll tell me what's all this I've been hearing about you?" All at once he seemed to become aware of Mrs. Arkwright. "Oh! I didn't see you'd got company," he said, as though it had not been the news of her visit, heard by chance on his rounds, which alone had brought him. "Beg pardon, ma'am, but I've got a bit of business with this reverend gent as must be settled right off between us two. Maybe you'd be so obliging as to leave us to it."

In mere bewilderment Sarah made a step as if to comply; Jesse sprang forward and caught her by the arm,

"Don't go!" he implored; "for the love of Heaven don't leave me! He'll kill me; he'll kill me body and soul."

Westoby ground his heel upon the floor in a fury of impatience.

"Kill you, you whining, sneaking, white-livered cur!" he exclaimed. "Do you take me for quite a fool? Kill you! here and now? Hadn't I better go and fetch a policeman, right away, and ask him to see it done?" Then with a sudden change from sarcasm to ferocity, "Now then, stir your stumps; you've got legs, I suppose, as well as her; if she won't go you can come; we'll have this out somewhere else. I'm not particular whether it's here or there."

He flung open the door again, and motioned Jesse out.

"Now, then!" he repeated, sternly, but with already controlled impatience.

Jesse dropped his hold of Sarah's arm. She turned a little, took his burning hand in one of hers, and laid the other on his shoulder. But it was Westoby who held her gaze, whom her gaze held.

"The Lord rebuke thee, Satan," she said. "Don't go, brother."

She gave herself no practical explanation of the situation; she cared for none. The spiritual core of it was all with which she was concerned. A soul hung between heaven and hell; was this the moment to ask exactly how it came to be there? Her eyes, her face, were transfigured as they had scarcely been since her wedding-day. Westoby saw that light—the light which had been there when, for the first time, he had seen her face turned towards him on the ship—understood it, and cursed it in his heart. He gathered up his forces. Suddenly he changed his tone.

"Here's a lot of high-falutin' nonsense about a little matter of business," he exclaimed, with a harsh laugh. "That's what it is to have the women to do with. Come on; you must see for yourself that there's nothing to be done here. And this thing's bound to be settled; you don't need for me to tell you that. D—— you," he ended, with a relapse into uncontrollable exasperation, "you ain't afraid for your precious life still?"

"Don't go, brother, as you value the life of your soul."

"His soul," sneered Westoby. If the thing must needs be fought out on these lines, he was not unequal to the occasion. "It's a bit late in the day to begin to bother about that, ain't it, my lad? I reckon there ain't much damage left to be done in that quarter. If that's all that's keeping you, you're a fool for your pains. You'd best make the neatest job you can still of this world, because

you've settled your chances in the next; young man, take my word for it."

Jesse flung himself into the nearest chair; with his face hidden on the arm thrown across the chair-back he motioned Sarah away with the other hand.

"Go!" he cried; "go and leave me. If he's the devil himself—and I believe he is—he's speaking the truth this time. I know it is too late; I knew it all along."

"Truth!" echoed Sarah. "No. The blackest of lies."

Jesse raised his head and looked round; his whole face was changed, hardened into a sullen despair.

"You don't know—" he began, with a sort of anger.

"Nor ain't going to," interposed Westoby, suggestively.

"No, you're not going to," he went on, recklessly. "If you did, you wouldn't talk like that. Go away; you only make things worse. It's not for me. Will you leave me?"

"No."

Westoby laughed, such a laugh as might make the blood boil in the veins of the coldest. He did not really hope to effect anything practical thereby, but his hatred absolutely required that much vent. It did not sting the most passing flush of color to Sarah's cheek. Perhaps she had scarcely heard. She was kneeling now by Jesse's side.

"Go away," he repeated, yet was the iteration rather hopeless than sullen. "It's no use, I tell you. I sold myself to him and I'm his. I'm his, body and soul."

"Right you are, my boy," said Westoby, with a grim cheerfulness.

"Listen, brother," she said, gently. "I cannot contend with this man; the Lord has not given me the gift of speech. But as long as I'm here you shall not be his. And I shall stay. As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. I will not leave this house, except—you go with me."

Westoby broke out with an oath. He would have been glad to recall it the next moment, as testifying too plainly to the strength of her position; but for once he had been taken by surprise.

She gave as little heed to the oath as to the laughter. Still upon her knees, her pleading hands were on Jesse's arm; her pleading eyes, steady with a faith mighty to kindle faith, yearning with such love as begets hope, were fixed on his face; they stood between him and the fascination of the enemy's.

"Brother," she said, softly, and again, "brother!"

He looked up for a moment, his face lost nothing of its gloom, yet something of the hardness died out of it. He sighed; a hopeless little sound in itself, yet she blessed it. She stood up and took his hand, and he did not draw it away.

"Brother," she said, "won't you come home with me?"

Westoby laughed again.

"Well! it takes one of your saints for that! What? you can't see enough of him here, can't you? not even with the missus away! Ay, take him home with you—*sister*! Dear Sam 'll never know; only mind he's back by the house bright and early, and dear Mattie need never be the wiser either!"

She was standing confronting him then. For a moment a shadow of disgust trembled on the pale face untinted by any blush. Then even that passed.

"I am very sorry for you, Mr. Westoby," she said, quietly.

He looked her back straight in the eyes—and was silent. The same instant she turned.

"Come, brother," she said.

She gave a little upward pressure to the hand she held; half mechanically he stood up, his hand still in hers like a child's. They made a step towards the open door; another. Then, with one backward stride, Westoby stood again upon the threshold. Jesse stopped and shrank.

"You fool!" said Westoby, and there was a strange new tone in his voice. "Do you think I don't know when I'm beaten? She's won, and I wish her joy of you; to my mind, you're as little worth saving—if saved you be—as you were worth damning, but that's not my affair. But if I kept my hands off you before, you needn't put yourself in a funk on that score now. *I'm* no mongrel nigger, not to know how to take a licking properly."

He made a half-sarcastic motion of salute towards Sarah as he stood; then the door of the room crashed behind him, next the door of the house. Into the rain and the night he had passed out of his victim's outward life forever.

The thunder moaned in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXIV

It was still raining hard when Westoby left the house, though the storm was passing over. With his hat pulled down over his brows and his head bent, he took his way, through the pitchy darkness, along the road which was now a river. In two or three minutes he had come to the point where the street in which the Runcimans lived joined the main road. A turn to the right would have led him down to Dutoitspan and Dreyer's canteen; perhaps it was more than could be expected of human nature that, though he remembered this, Westoby should go a good mile out of his way, at a time when hours had become precious, for the sake of the person whom, chiefly, he had to thank for the present catastrophe. At any rate, he did take the turn to the left, and began to breast the hill towards Kimberley.

He knew the game was up, knew that Jesse's actual confession was now merely a question of a few minutes, sooner or later. A little tenderness, a little patient firmness, and everything would be out. It was quite likely that he would repent of that confession next day, when he would have to face the consequences in all their miserable details. This might possibly be some mental satisfaction to Westoby, who certainly did sincerely hope that Jesse might find his punishment to be everything that his own imagination, or that of his late master, could suggest. But it could not make any practical difference to the situation. Even if Runciman's sense of honor should extend to omitting any mention of his principal in his story (a thing which that principal not unjustifiably thought very doubtful), there could be no doubt whatever that the least ingenious lawyer could get the whole matter from him in five minutes' questioning. It remained therefore, now, only to consider how best to provide for his own safety.

As he strode along through the streaming blackness, he tried hard to keep himself sufficiently calm to go over in his mind plans which were certainly not now made for the first time. But at first, even *his* will was not equal to the effort. The rage that possessed him would not be ignored. Presently he realized this, and,

realizing it, deliberately allowed himself to work off his temper so far as circumstances would permit. He left the road and plunged into the bordering veld. He stumbled on for some distance—and the difficulty of walking was already some relief—and at last he cast himself down upon the sodden ground. Then he gave himself up. He sat and fairly let his passion tear him, let every limb work with it, every distorted feature; exhausted himself in every choking frenzied imprecation that his imagination could supply. In the extremely improbable event of any one being within ear-shot, it did not greatly matter now.

The plan answered perfectly. In about fifteen minutes he had sworn and raged himself into composure. His mind was clear now; he did not try to force it back at once into a track beset with irritations, but allowed it to concentrate itself on the question of how to get back to the road. He had gone farther than he knew, and had only a general idea of his bearings, but at last he struck the road at a point a little below the top of the hill. By that time he was fairly himself again.

He had just got abreast of the Half-way House; light streamed out through the open doors of the bar; the little space of ground and wall and gum-tree, which it revealed, were all glistening with wet. As Westoby passed across the utmost limit of the light, a native, who had been sitting huddled up disconsolately enough under such shelter as a mimosa-bush on the edge of the road afforded, rose and followed him. The sound of paddling unshod feet in a shuffling trot made Westoby stop and turn. Before he could utter either inquiry or abuse a twist of paper was thrust into his hand, and without a word the messenger had scuttled back into the darkness. He could hear the steps dying away in the direction of Beaconsfield.

Westoby stood a moment; a certain foreboding was upon him. He tried to identify the native in his mind, but the darkness, the swiftness, the silence, in which the transaction had passed baffled him. He untwisted the paper in his hand, smoothing it out in his palm; then he struck a light and tried to decipher the writing, but the little blue flame went out in the rain with a hiss and a splutter. He strode on a little more quickly than before; he was getting into Kimberley now, but the weather had cleared the roads of passengers; when he stopped again under a street-lamp near the Hospital, it was in a perfect solitude. Standing close by the lamp-post he began to read.

"You were trap the night before last. I take my Bible oath I tell you the truth."

Westoby neither started nor swore. He stared at the paper a little, then read the words through carefully again. After that, with his usual motion of putting his hand to his beard, he stood for a few seconds with bent head thinking, then he raised it, shook himself a little, and walked on, but slowly, thinking still.

The night before last: he had been at Dreyer's canteen, for the first time since their quarrel. He had appointed a meeting there for a native of whom Dreyer had told him, as of one with whom he had had dealings in old days at Jagersfontein. He recalled the details, the commonplace details of a commonplace transaction: the well-known shabby room, with its cretonne-covered walls and thick cretonne window-curtains, its low canvas ceiling, the paraffine lamp on the square table, the lead-foil, the stones; the semi-civilized native in nondescript working-clothes, half bargain-driving, half obsequious; Christian Dreyer himself.

And all the while, somewhere behind those invisibly pierced walls, or crouched outside in the yard, beneath that curtained window—traitorously opened for sound maybe, traitorously arranged to admit of sight—the detectives had seen and noted all. He had been trapped; as simply and easily as the merest novice.

He remembered now that Dreyer had been rather drunk that night, had been at least short of sober, stupid and confused, inclined to vague and blear-eyed staring and thick, reluctant utterance. The thing was neither so usual as to be unnoticeable, nor so rare as to excite any particular surprise. To Westoby, knowing that his associate would be suffering agonies of nervousness at this resumption of business on his premises, it had seemed natural enough. Dreyer had been trying to keep up his spirits, and had rather overdone it—nothing more. Fear of the law, fear of Westoby himself, that had seemed to account for all. He alone knew to what heights that fear of himself might have grown; he had been rather pleased, soothed by the thought during the anxious, worried day that had succeeded that gray dawn of his return from the Free State; to-night he freely owned his folly in having driven the canteen-keeper to the point where fear becomes desperation.

For there was nothing in Dreyer's fear of the imaginative superstitious awe which paralyzed Jesse Runciman. Dreyer's fear was of a strictly practical description, and when it became unbearable, when it seemed actually to trench upon fulfilment, he would know

practical means of helping himself, such as would never have occurred to Jesse. And Westoby had threatened his life, had even given him a physical foretaste of what a violent death might be.

Yet he had never thought of treason; he who yet would have been the first to admit that all that he hath will such a man as Dreyer give for his life; how much more such a mere moral luxury as his sense of honor! No; he had never thought of it. His heart had not gone with his associate on the night following that stormy daybreak; it had shown him nothing of a figure slinking through the darkness to a house in Lanyon Terrace—a house where visitors of this description, though they might not be refused, were better known than respected; slinking in, frankly hang-dog; slinking out again some half-hour later little less hang-dog than he had gone in. His heart had told him nothing of all this at the time; to-night it seemed that any one short of an idiot would have expected it all along.

Once, as he went, he made an instinctive gesture as though to tear the warning paper into undecipherable fragments, but seemed to change his mind. Twenty minutes later he had reached his room. It was still early, little more than nine o'clock. He locked the door, then lighted a lamp and again looked at the note. It was written with watery ink and a spluttering pen on a dirty scrap of common letter-paper; the writing showed an illiterate attempt at disguising an illiterate hand. Westoby went to a safe in a corner of the room, and from a tin box inside it took out a bundle of papers. He brought them over to the table, and sorting them rapidly came at last to one which he threw down beside the note. It was an I O U of recent date, and bore the signature of Christian Dreyer. For a moment Westoby compared the two, then he pushed both papers away with a sort of laugh.

"I thought as much," he said.

He scarcely blamed Dreyer, he had acted after his nature; he could even believe that he had acted with reluctance, between the lines it was not hard to read remorse. But, indeed, his temper now felt strangely calm; it seemed as though the very magnitude of this blow, following so close upon the other, had restored his mental equilibrium.

The first thing he did now was to hold the note over the chimney of the lamp; in an instant it was tinder and gray ash. Then he tied up the papers as before and put them back. There was no need for sorting and burning now that the crisis had come; Westoby had

never encouraged the style of correspondence which would require such measures. He took out, instead, a well-worn pocket-book, fluttered over for a moment the bank-notes that it contained, and thrust it into the pocket of a coat which was hanging over a chair.

He knew that at any moment now, literally at any moment, he might find himself arrested; that there might not be five minutes more of freedom left him. Yet he showed nothing of any desperate haste. Quickly, but without hurry, he proceeded to change his saturated, mud-stained clothes. Once more dressed, this time for riding, he filled a travelling-flask with whiskey from a bottle in a sort of cupboard against the wall, strapped up a mackintosh into a compact bundle, then put on another of his soft hats, took down his riding-whip from a nail, gave a last look round the room, and went out. The lamp he left alight.

He crossed the yard to the stable, saddled his horse, led him out into the street, mounted, and rode off at a brisk trot.

He might take it for granted that he was being watched; but he could now at least count on so much starting time as would be necessary for the alarm to be given at headquarters. The nearest point at which he could cross the border of the Free State would have been towards Boshof, but to reach that direct he must have increased his risks by retraversing the whole width of Kimberley. He determined rather to make something of a false start, and then strike for the border at some point higher up and less likely to be guarded than the more usual issues. Every yard of the veld for miles round was little less familiar to him than were the streets of the town; to steer across it for any given point presented no difficulty at all. Now he rode on along the North Circular Road, between the rampart-like mounds of what is now the Central Company's mine; the pant of steam and occasional clank of machinery mingled with the beating of his horse's hoofs. In another minute he had turned sharp to the right and rode briskly for some three miles up the long, flat stretch of the Barkly Road.

The rain had ceased; the clouds were passing over towards the west, and between them the moon shone fitfully. Westoby settled himself in his saddle; now that the worst had come he was conscious of something which was almost of the nature of relief.

Perhaps the rapid motion, the sense of danger, gave to his mood even a touch of exhilaration. All intermediaries, as it were, set aside—Runciman, Dreyer, Sarah Arkwright—he stood to fight this thing out with Providence. He had been badly beaten so far. Yet,

if he could now escape, if by skill or daring or strength of man and beast he could wrest his threatened liberty from the power that menaced it, he might conquer still. A new life must begin for him perhaps; yet not as it were one to build up from its foundations. Or, even so, he was conscious in every limb, with every faculty, of being still in the very hey-day of his physical and mental powers. With years of experience behind him, years of vigorous middle age before him, in a country opening up in all directions, what might he not yet do and be?

The scrubby levels of the veld spread dark around him; between them, a straight, glistening line where the broken moonlight shone on the mud and chains of pools, the road seemed to flow from beneath the flying hoofs; a moist, cool air, too faint to be called a breeze, played about his face and in his horse's mane. For the mere pleasure of the thing he could have ridden on thus through the empty night for hours; but already he had discerned in the wavering watery grayness the landmark which showed the point at which he meant to leave the road.

For some quarter of a minute he reined up, bending ears keen as those of a savage, lest at any farthest distance, along the way he had come, he might even already hear the tramlings of pursuit. The breathless expectant silence of the night lay upon everything; the sound—what is it?—for which it always seems to wait, did not come; Westoby turned his horse's head towards the right, and began his ride across the veld.

Now was the time for every sense to be on the alert, for every faculty to be turned to watchfulness. Riding on, guiding his trackless course now by some rift-revealed star, now by some mark recognizable by himself alone, he searched continually the spaces of veld before and around him, as far as the gray moon-twilight allowed his well-practised eye to reach. But he saw nothing. Bushes, indeed, moving cloud-shadows, lifelike and suspicious enough to ordinary eyes; they cost him not an instant's tension of nerve or quickening of pulse; he was not to be deceived by these. Once, far away on his left, he saw the red spark-like glow of some outspan fire, and of human life no other sign at all.

He was not now urging his horse to its utmost; for some time past he had been rather restraining it, riding at nothing more than a quick trot. He might have been riding thus for several miles, perhaps he had traversed half the space that lay between him and safety, when, dim among the vagueness to the right, he saw something

moving. Something which was neither stray ox nor mule, which, even as he looked, flashed out a gleam as the moon struck on stirrup-steel and white riding-breeches. At the same moment a shout reached him—far away still both sight and sound. Westoby put spurs to his horse.

Heavy weight though he rode, his horse was well up to it, and he had a good start of the two troopers. In front, near enough now to be descried in the misty dissolving light, rose the Boshof hills, low, gray, shadowy undulations, and towards those the chase swept. The boundary line lay on the hither side.

On through the night, with a dull thunder of hoofs upon the soft, loose soil, now among a clump of shadowy mimosa-bushes, now, themselves most like more substantial shadows, across the open spaces, they fled like phantoms with no sound but that one low, swift, monotonous thud; on towards that invisible line which meant so much, on which, with supremest tension of nerve, the thoughts, the eyes of all were fixed. The pursued gave no look back, the pursuers looked not on one another. The rage of the racer was upon them; the prize for them such professional honor as might scarcely be won again in many years; the prize for him all that makes life worth having, the forfeiture— He had no expectation of being let off with anything short of the maximum sentence: fifteen years of grim servitude, of death in life.

On through the night, and still no perceptible gain or loss, and now the border was but a couple of miles away. Five minutes; the distance was reduced by nearly one half, and then Westoby's horse stumbled. It was but a loss to be counted by seconds, but before he could make it good the troopers were perceptibly nearer. Not near enough, though; surely not near enough to snatch liberty from his very grasp! He could actually see it now—the bush with the big stone under it which lay upon the other side; could see it, though a mist born of brain-troubling excitement was before his eyes; could recognize it, even though for the moment thought had ceased to be, nothing left but mere sensation. Only half a mile; and then, broken and panting with swiftness, yet borne plainly enough on the wind that whistled past his ear, a cry rang out again upon the night,

“Stop, or I fire.”

Westoby looked round and laughed. The cry came for the second time. He looked back no more. It came for the third time. A quarter of a mile now; three hundred yards— A red flash through

the moonlight, a report, and Westoby's horse rolled over on the veld. When, a moment later, the troopers reached the spot, they found the rider lying beneath him. They dismounted and bent over the prostrate forms. The moon shone out in splendor from between two drifting clouds. Westoby lay with closed eyes and white face upturned to the sky; his left leg, curiously contorted, was half hidden beneath the horse. They stood up and looked at each other; then the elder man said,

"I'll put that poor brute out of pain first, anyhow."

And with the word it was done. Then they set to work to extricate Westoby; he groaned once or twice, but did not fairly recover consciousness. The trooper knelt down by his side and gave a closer look at the injured limb.

"Compound fracture, I fancy," he said in a semi-professional tone. "Hand over the water, Davidson; we must bring him to, though it's not so easy to say how we're to get him back."

The first part of the business was easily accomplished. In about a minute Westoby opened his eyes, staring a little amazedly for a moment; then, with a heavy frown, closed them again, and turned his head aside as best he could, muttering an oath.

The troopers were consulting what to do. There chanced to be no farm for miles, no means of transport. There seemed nothing for it but for Davidson to ride back to Kimberley and fetch help. His hand was already on his saddle when Westoby's voice, hoarse and faint with pain, but quite steady, took both men by surprise.

"Damn you!" he said, with a sort of contemptuous impatience. "You're Englishmen, I reckon, if you *are* police. Do you suppose I can't ride?"

It had certainly not occurred to them that he could. Yet if he were willing to try, it might be the better plan, better, at least, than to lie for hours, heated with riding, on the dripping veld, with the cold night wind, now rising in rapid gusts, chilling him to the bone. The elder trooper hesitated a sort of surprised assent, half doubt, half relief. Westoby honored the hesitation with a scornful oath.

"You'll find some whiskey in the pocket of my saddle," he said. "Let me have a pull at that, and then you must give me a hoist up on whichever animal is best up to my weight."

Not without a sort of admiration, they brought him the flask. He took a moderate draught, and handed it back to the nearest trooper.

"Now, then!" he said; and set his teeth.

It was no child's play to get him on to the horse, not even though he really helped himself so far as was possible. By the time it was done his face was gray and distorted with suffering, the drops streamed from his brow; but except to give a brief word of direction he had not uttered a sound. Once settled in the saddle, he made a sign for the whiskey, took another draught, and the return began.

It was then close upon midnight. At three o'clock in the morning they rode into the compound of Kimberley Jail. But of the details of that ride Westoby could never remember anything at all. Yet he did not again really lose consciousness. It was not till the horses stood still in the prison-yard that the stupendous strain of will by which he had retained it relaxed. With it, the grasp which he had kept upon the saddle-front relaxed too; his great hands fell inert; he reeled a little forward upon the horse's neck, and fainted.

CHAPTER XXXV

SAMUEL and Sarah Arkwright sat together on a slope of the veld. It was the afternoon of Sam's first day of liberty. The shadows of the mimosa-bushes were growing long across the rolling plain; the great expanse of blue overhead was touched with the first premonitions of evening, a chastening rather than a change of hue; the low hills and kopjes on the horizon gleamed in strange desert tints of pink and lilac.

And the land was as the Garden of Eden before them. Bare and barren and formless as it was, beautiful perhaps to none, attractive only to a very few, to these two to-day it was nothing less than that. And if some of the road behind them had lain through a rather desolate wilderness (and of Sarah at least this was true), she recked little of that now. One verse rang in her mind, it had sung to her all the day—"For he shall not much remember all the days of his life, because God answereth him in the joy of his heart." Not much remember! somewhat, maybe, for thankfulness, for pain not at all.

Her hand was lying on her husband's knee, and now and then he put out his own, and gave it a half-rough little squeeze, and their eyes would meet for a moment. Then he would turn again to tease, as affection teases, the ugly, red-dust-stained, nondescript white dog,

him back that morning. of chaff of all kinds, as the master. For each other, husband words, other than the most super- nor transport, beyond that of the first truer bridal—of which Sarah never knew had been hers, so loyally swift had been the re- which, after all, had passed into spontaneity be- and parted.

Sam ceased playing with the dog; after a few unavail- to induce him to renew the game it nestled panting to and he sat fondling it roughly from time to time. His look wandered over the veld, and at last seemed to fix on where, below them, the ash-gray roofs and red-brown walls of Beaconsfield and the Inn huddled confusedly in the hollow. Sarah's eyes followed him; among the confusion of roofs she could distinguish the line of the street in which the Runcimans had lived. She knew his thought before he spoke. Yet, though it was one near to the heart of both, it was not the deepest thought of either.

"Poor chap!" he said; then, after a pause, "It must have been pretty bad for him."

"Yes," said Sarah, and she sighed a little even to-day; "he has been through deep waters."

"How is he taking it all, I wonder?"

Sarah shook her head.

"I know nothing now," she said. "I have not seen him to speak to since he gave himself up. I was there the day of the trial before the Special Court, but that was a week ago, and we have heard nothing since."

He looked a certain surprise.

"You were in court?"

"Yes; Mattie wished it. She could not bear to go herself, yet she wanted to know—one can understand. She begged me to go; I could not refuse. If he chanced to see me, I knew he would not mind; he would know how it was. I don't know—it might even have been a comfort to him; did I tell you he asked me to go with him to the police-station that afternoon? Oh, Sam," she said, with a touch of agitation breaking through her gentle pitifulness, "I can't think clearly yet; it all seems so strange, so different to everything I had always thought! How could I ever have believed, even a few weeks ago, that I should be standing by him like that?" Her voice

sank again to the uttermost simplicity of compassion. "He had hold of my hand, Sam, all the time he was telling; and when they were obliged to ask him questions he kept looking at me."

Sam looked at her now; he felt rather strangely; his emotions were confused, inexplicable even to himself. Yet there was nothing in them ignoble. He was proud, in his honest heart, if he was not altogether delighted.

"Poor chap!" he said again, finding, indeed, nothing so generally safe and comprehensive to say.

"So I thought he would not mind. But, indeed, I think he didn't notice me at all; I feel sure he didn't. He never looked round for a minute, from the time he was brought in; only straight before him or on the ground—mostly on the ground. I couldn't see his face well, I was too far off, and—and—yes, I was crying too." Her voice was not quite steady for the moment, now. "But I suppose he must have been looking very ill, because they would have allowed him to sit down; but he wouldn't. And it was after that he lifted up his head for a minute—there, in the dock. I think he felt just then as if he didn't want to be let off anything; not even a little of the staring. Oh, Sam, that dreadful staring!"

She seemed to bear the memory of it with less courage than she had borne the ordeal itself, on the day they two had stood up to face it together.

"Never mind, old lady," he said, soothingly; "it's all over now."

"Yes," she said; "all over!" There was a moment's rising, as of passion, in her voice. It came to nothing, yet. "But about him. He only looked up that one minute; then not any more at all. I'm sure he had made up his mind to go through with everything, but about half way through he fainted. It was only for two or three minutes; they brought him round without taking him out of court. But after that he was dazed, I think; he seemed not to rightly understand what was going on. The judge spoke very nicely at the last, Sam; but I think he scarcely heard. Only when the sentence was given, he looked up again and stared a bit, but he didn't speak or seem much upset; only that he stumbled a little as he was going out, as if he was but half awake. They had to help him."

There was a pause; then Sam said, with a sort of compassionate interrogation,

"Five years hard, you said?"

"Yes. Oh, it's dreadful, dreadful! and yet, Sam, I do believe it

won't be so bad as what he has been through this last three months. I don't think anything could be."

"Maybe not," said Sam, rather doubtfully. He had not seen, and could scarcely realize, that tyranny. "But— It ain't nice." Taken in conjunction with the tone, the very inadequacy of the words was eloquent.

Sarah drew a little nearer; her hand sought his with the old movement—and a difference. When last they had thus sat side by side, it was the wife's hand that had fondled the husband's. To-day hers stole into his, and lay at rest there in the clasp that closed upon it. And again a silence fell, a silence in which Jesse Runciman had ever less and less share in the thoughts of either.

For some minutes they sat so. Then, not suddenly, but as with a quietly formed resolution, Sarah drew a little back from her husband; her hands, withdrawn from his, were clasped upon her knees; her eyes, steady and serene, were fixed upon his face.

"Listen, Sam," she said; "because I owe it you to say this, and maybe I sha'n't find words again. I scarcely find them now; it is all new to me. I have not passed this way heretofore."

She spoke with a steady simplicity, which had its pathos, though she felt none. There was no tremor in the voice with which the twelve months' wife confessed, while she surrendered, the long virginity of her heart.

"I knew very little, Sam," she went on, and her voice took a sort of pleading; "I did not know what men meant by love."

"I'd have been glad enough to teach you, missus," he said; there was something of reproach through all the would-be lightness of his tone. "I loved you all the while."

"Yes; I know now. But even if I had known it before, maybe I could scarcely have done better. I think one can't reproach one's self into loving. I don't know how it comes. I think God giveth it to His beloved in sleep—like He gave Eve to Adam at the first. Or, as if," she went on, musingly, tracking the thought of her unaccustomed heart, "as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. That is how it has been with me, Sam."

"So long as you've got it," he said. But the tone was not the tone of doubt.

"Yes," she said. "On that night—the night it all came out—that was when I found it was there. Then, in all that dreadful scat-

tering and confusion— I can't rightly tell you about *that* part; do you remember the word that says, 'It shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth'? That was how *it* was with me, so far as poor Mr. Runciman's part in it went."

"It must have been a big upset." He spoke sympathetically, yet he could, after all, enter but little into that matter, and she did not expect it of him.

"Yes," she said again, very simply, and paused. "But then I knew. Because when I should have thought my heart must have been breaking—I found it was glad."

In the dumbness he could not conquer he made a little sound like laughter, between amazement and content.

"I lay awake all that night, Sam, and I wondered and wondered till at the last I came to understand; and all of my heart that was not going out in prayer for him went up in thanksgiving. Because I knew, then, all that the Lord had meant to give me, when He gave me to you."

Her breath came a little deeper, a little quicker; she put out her hands, and he took them in his and held them.

"I had doubted you, Sam, I had gone near condemning you. But that night I didn't think to feel sorry, I didn't think to feel ashamed; so far as the east is from the west all that seemed to be put from me. I didn't seem to need to think of wanting forgiveness. I suppose I ought to have, but I didn't."

"I'm glad," he said. "Never do. That's all done with."

"I know," she said. "All over, all over!"

It seemed the one refrain of her soul that day. She looked at him, and her pale eyes shone, and her pale face had a strange, new youth in it. Then she drew her hands away again from his.

"I want you to do something for me," she said.

"Anything, missus, and be glad."

She laid her right hand upon the ringed third finger of her left.

"I'm not one to undervalue ordinances," she said. "But it comes upon me that when you put this on my finger we were but under the law, as it were. I was yours; if all this had never been, if it had pleased the Lord that we should walk apart in spirit all the days of our life, I should have done my duty by you, God helping me, unto the end. But since it has pleased Him to give me so much more—of His royal bounty—I would not be yours as the bondwoman, but as the free."

She held out her left hand to him.

"Will you make as if you were putting it on again?" she said.

He was greatly moved; moved for the moment beyond awkwardness. But emotion did not give him words. He did not take the ring off; the ceremonial would have been too elaborate for the temperament of either. But he drew it up a little along the somewhat labor-worn finger, and pushed it gently back again to its place. Then he took her in his arms.

"God bless you, wife," he said, and kissed her on the lips. When she drew away her face it was wet with happy tears.

"Oh! *this*," she cried, softly, "*this* is the day that the Lord hath made for us two. We will rejoice and be glad in it!"

For a little while she sat with her hand in his; her head rested on his shoulder and his arm was round her waist. Then a distant clock struck five. She raised her head.

"We must go," she said. "Mattie will be wanting her tea."

Her tone showed no kind of abrupt transition from the half spiritual, half lover-like ecstacy of her last words. Nothing in this woman touched her husband more at once to veneration and to tenderness than the impossibility of seeing where, in her, the spiritual ended and the natural began. Each flowed into each.

Now he rose at her bidding. The slangy remonstrances which would have seemed so natural under the circumstances did not at this moment even rise in his mind. He was solemnized just now, as he had not been on his wedding-day. But, indeed, if the discovery of that night had caused the woman to renew, or rather first to find, her youth, the experiences of the past two months had brought the man at last to manhood. It was legible in his very face. He had not, certainly, left his youth behind him in the prison, but he had left his childishness.

They walked home together with their faces set towards the westering sun; they spoke little, and that of common things. They would speak together no more as they had done but now. But there was that in their look which spoke even to the casual passer-by—which spoke, almost like an insult, to Mattie Runciman, standing half concealed behind the curtain at the parlor window, as, unseen herself, she watched them drawing near.

She crept back to her Madeira chair, flinging the novel in her hand to the ground, and hid her face among the cushions and began to cry with some dull sense of added injury.

To match the love-tale in those faces what had she? The memory of a white, desperate face, raised suddenly from the hands which

had shrouded his shame to confront the fretful anger and reproach of hers. Of a voice, dried of tears, that spoke as out of the abyss, "Yes, before I sinned for you I loved you. And now I can scarcely remember how it felt."

CHAPTER XXXVI

"OH, Sarah, I can't go! Well, yes, I'll forgive him, then, if you say I must; if he's really dying. But I can't go. I should be no comfort to him; I tell you he hates me now. I won't go and have any more such things said to me as he said that day; you don't know what horrid things they were, right down wicked, I'd not like to repeat them." Mattie's sobs of mingled fear and indignation broke out anew. "And he's a minister! though it's little enough he seems to have thought of that, to be sure. No; you go, tell him I forgive him. There's no use for us to meet."

"Mattie, darling, you *must* go."

"You're very unkind!"

"I should be very unkind to let you keep to a word you'd be sorry for all your life, dearie," said Sarah, patiently.

"You don't know all I've put up with; no, nor half. But this was too much. To be the wife of a thief, of a convict on the Breakwater! And then for him to have the face to say he did it for me!"

"Darling, surely that should not make you harder to him."

"Yes, everybody takes his part! If I had gone in for I. D. B., I suppose I'd have been interesting. As I'm only an I. D. B.'s wife—"

Mattie threw up her head with an injured sob. Sarah really did not know what to do with her. And time was going on, and Jesse Runciman's life was ebbing out with the day; they had been told he could not live to see another. For some few weeks he had been working out his sentence; long enough, perhaps, to let him taste the full quality, at least, of its bitterness. The work, indeed, to which he had been set had been of the lightest kind. It had been imposed at all out of real consideration for his health, otherwise that part of his punishment would scarcely have come into effect before his removal to Cape Town. But his mental sufferings during the

unemployed days before his trial had been so severe that it seemed cruel, and even dangerous, to condemn him to a longer period of unoccupied brooding. To a certain extent, his health did improve. Perhaps the crisis which, after all, had put an end to the awful nervous strain of the previous months had come just in time to avert brain-fever. But those months had broken down his constitution; it was unable to resist the slightest attack; there was no rallying power left. A chill, how contracted it was impossible to say; three days' illness; and now hope was over. And Mattie sat and cried, and could not be induced to move.

For a moment Sarah felt in despair. She clasped her hands, and her lips were moving unknown to herself, in the intensity of her perplexity. Mattie looked at her for a few moments askance.

"Don't pray for me, Sarah," she broke out, snappishly; "I won't be prayed for!" Then, before any answer was possible, "It won't be any use. I know I'm wicked, and I mean to be wicked—so, there! *They* made me so, the people at Marston. Why couldn't they leave me alone? I'd have done well enough; I never set up for a saint, but I wasn't wicked, then— You know I wasn't, Gran-nie," she said, with a change of tone infinitely piteous.

"My dearie, my dearie!"

She drew Mattie's head upon her breast, and scarcely could she have traced to their source the sudden tears that mingled with those of her little girl. Sarah was happy now; happy as she had never thought to be. Yet if, at this moment, a wish could have set her back with Mattie on the grass-plot between the high, dark-ivied walls beneath the willow-tree—set them back as they had been on that summer afternoon eighteen months before, with all that had been since blotted out, not only from memory but from fact: if a wish could have done this, it were rash to say that she would not have breathed it, even though love must have passed with the rest. "Forget also thine own people and thy father's house"; was it the new-born affection of a few weeks that could make easy the command to such a temperament as hers?

"But I'm wicked, now," poor Mattie went on; yet she spoke without the hardness of a few minutes before. "Isn't it a shocking thing that you should come and tell a girl her husband is dying, and she shouldn't be sorry a bit! Should you ever have thought I could have come to that?"

"Dearie, you aren't being just to yourself. You were taken by surprise; you've not rightly taken it in."

It was the truth, but Mattie did not know it. She shook her head.

"In times when people *might* have talked about me, when I was afraid sometimes about myself, I wasn't half so bad really—no, nothing like—as I am now. I was silly; oh! *how* silly I was!" The sudden color crimsoned in the little face, all too pale now as a rule. She spoke viciously. "But I wasn't wicked then; I didn't feel as if I would rather not be good; not at the very worst."

What could Sarah say? This girl, a child still in most ways compared to her friend, had yet gone through experiences such as never had, nor ever could, come to the elder woman. She could but caress in silence. Finding no more opposition, Mattie began to parley.

"I don't suppose he is really so very bad," she said, deprecatingly. "He always used to get into such a state over a very little, whatever went wrong. It would be just like him to send off in a fright."

"How could *he* have anything to say about sending, now?" said Sarah, sadly. "And they don't pay much heed to fancies *there*."

Mattie looked a little startled, for the first time. In fact, prison-life meant nothing practical to her; only a vague disgrace.

"Well, I don't see much use in my going," she protested, rising nevertheless. "I sha'n't know what to say to him. I suppose we haven't spoken to each other for the last two months, without it was to say something nasty. It's easy enough, now, to see what was the matter with him."

But all the while she was moving fretfully about the bedroom, getting on her out-door clothes. The dressing-table was covered with toilet luxuries and daintinesses, her drawers and boxes were full of garments and knick-knacks representing a scale of expenditure little suited to the slender stipend of a mission minister. She stood at last ready but for her gloves. The bangles on her pretty arms got in her way as she pulled them on. She shook them back impatiently.

"Nasty things!" she said, petulantly, and her gaze, hardening again, took in the whole. "Mightn't anybody have had the sense to know that I'd rather never have seen one of them than to have been got into such a scrape as this? How could it be worth while?"

Her frame of mind did not seem to promise much either of comfort or of profit from the meeting. But when, half an hour later, she stood by the bedside in a ward of the prison hospital, a change

came over her. She knew little of illness, yet she could not doubt that the man lying there under the coarse brown blanket, gazing straight before him with great, languid, wistful eyes, in which the fire of fever was burning low now unto death—she could not doubt that he was dying. And she was frightened, scarcely knew whether more frightened at finding herself within the walls of a prison or at being in the presence of death. She sat down by the bedside, and stole glances round her with scared eyes; and she forgot how wicked she was, poor child, and only felt rather pitiful and unutterably forlorn. She wished Sarah had come in; she felt even a kind of protection in the presence of a warder at the far end of the room, of a convict attendant moving about. Anything was better than to be left alone with *him*.

He had turned his head for a moment, with a languid motion, when she had first come up to the bed, but for a moment only. It was Mattie's voice which, in a sort of tremulous whisper, first broke the spell of silence.

"Are you very sick, Jesse?"

He turned his fading eyes upon her.

"Yes; I am dying."

"Oh—no," she said, vaguely. To which he made no reply at all.

"Sarah said you wanted to see me," she resumed, after a long pause.

"To say good-by."

"Oh, dear," said Mattie, "how dreadful everything is!" And she began to cry.

"I am sorry to have brought all this trouble and disgrace upon you," he said, after a moment, in the same faint, impassive voice as before. "But you will soon be free of it, now."

"Don't talk like that, Jesse."

He took no heed of the protest.

"I have done wrong by you in every way," he went on. "There is no provision for you. And *here*—I am so helpless—it is not only the dying." He said this with a sort of restlessness, then seemed to restrain himself. "Perhaps the Society will do something; they ought not to visit this on *you*. Mrs. Arkwright may be able to persuade them; but, of course, I have no claim upon them any more. You are not even left a minister's widow, you know," he said, with a bitter sadness. "You know all about that." And then he muttered, too low for her to hear, "'Let his days be few, and let another take his office.'"

"I'll not be asking them to do anything," said Mattie, vindictively, as soon as she found voice to speak at all. "Horrid old creatures!" She had had her share of lecturing too; and if her experience had been less terrible than his, she was bitterly resentful of any rebuke at all. "I'd not be beholden to one of them—not if I was starving. If . . . if it *really* comes to . . . what you say . . . I'll work my passage home somehow. I'll not stay in this miserable country any more. I wish—oh! how I wish—I'd never seen it!" she ended, passionately.

It might be that he wished the same. He only said faintly,

"I dare say that might be the best plan. But, no doubt, they will allow you your passage-money, at least."

Then he closed his eyes, and lay silent for a space, drifting quietly a little nearer down to death. Again it was Mattie who spoke first.

"Jesse," she said, piteously enough, "if—if . . . we could have our time all over again, I'd try to do better. I would, really!"

"I suppose we should both *try*," he murmured. But there was little hope in his voice; perhaps he saw too clearly, now, the hopelessness of their incompatibility. "You will wish me good-by?" he went on. "I do not ask you to stay to see the end."

She stooped down and kissed him, and he kissed her back; and she started at the touch of his brow and of his lips.

"Sha'n't I really see you any more?" she sobbed.

"Do you want to?" he asked, with a touch of surprise, which had in it nothing either of pleasure or of hope.

"Aren't you my husband? Why will you always ask such foolish questions, Jesse?" she replied, with evasive plaintiveness.

And, indeed, he knew the question had been a very foolish one.

"No," he said. "God knows how much I shall have to answer for in my dealings with you. But I think not for that—not for having spoiled your life, so far as your enjoying of it goes. You will soon forget."

She muttered something indistinct through her fast-coming sobs.

"Don't cry," he said, quietly. "I am glad that it should be so."

Glad! If the shadow on the dial of his life could have been set back for thrice the Hebrew monarch's fifteen years, there was that in his voice which showed that never, through days prolonged into old age, would he have known gladness any more. He lay silent

for some minutes after that, lay looking at her. Thus lingeringly had he looked, feeding passion greedily, in hours when every curve and dimple, every tint and glow and movement, had been a separate stirring of his heart to desire. Now he had come to the days when, in any case, desire shall fail. But with him it had failed long since. Thus, again, had he lain and looked in far other times. In long nights when the slow moonlight, dragging across the room, had rested for a while upon the lovely, half-veiled form, upon the face, fair and flushed with the sleep that would not come to him. Moments when, so he had told her, he had looked at her, thus unconscious, as a lost soul may look upon its seducer in hell.

Those times were past, too; to-day hatred was as dead as was desire. There was nothing between them now but a great passionless estrangement; it might almost be wondered whether in another world their souls would know each other, so little had they ever touched on earth.

Mattie cried on; her tears did not seem to agitate him, but, perhaps, he found them physically exhausting, for his voice was perceptibly weaker when he spoke again.

"I am getting very tired; I don't know how much longer I shall be able to think or speak. If Arkwright and Mrs. Arkwright have come, and it is allowed, I should like to see them now."

"They are here," she sobbed, rising. "I will send them. Is— is there anything I can get for you—do for you—before I go?"

She looked round vaguely, with helpless good-will.

"Nothing, thank you."

"Then—I'll—go and tell them."

"Thank you," he said; "it will be kind."

She went lingeringly, stopping a moment to speak to the warder on her way. Her husband sent no lingering glances after those lingering steps; only when they had died away he sighed once faintly: a sigh given to one detail of a vast regret.

The warder came and gave him some kind of stimulant, and a few minutes later the Arkwrights came in. This time he knew what he had to say. He spoke with the almost impassive manner he had used towards Mattie, of which it was hard to say whether it was the result of physical weakness or of conscious repression.

"I hoped you would come," he said. "I wanted to ask your forgiveness before I die."

"Oh! you needn't have sent to ask *that*, old chap," said Sam, with awkward heartiness. "It's all right about *that*, you know."

"You are very kind," he said, as before. "But it was right that I should ask. I wronged you very deeply. I am ashamed. If any words could mean more I would say them. If it were possible for any more disgrace to come upon me from without, I would be thankful for it, because it makes the shame here," he touched his breast, "a little easier to bear."

"Oh! . . . well . . ." said poor Sam, "you . . . you were in a most awful hole, you know. Like enough in your place, I—"

But native honesty, compelling him actually against his will to justice towards himself, even at the expense of seeming generosity to others, would not suffer him to complete the well-intentioned lie. The power of keen feeling was well-nigh over for Jesse Runciman, and yet, perhaps, one of the bitterest drops in the dregs of his cup of shame came to him in that little broken-off sentence from the lips of the man he had so long dared to despise. He drained it in silence; only his eyes sought Sarah's with a kind of self-scorn which was also an appeal. She laid her hand on his, as she knelt by the bed, and a whole world of compassion, strong with hope, shone out in her eyes.

"Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Thy name, O Lord," she said, very softly; and the words took a strange sound of benediction.

His sad eyes did not brighten, but his look lost something of its bitterness.

"Thank you, brother," he said, so quietly that Sam was comforted for his vague confusion. "It isn't for me to say 'God bless you'—not to anybody any more. But if I dared, I would."

Sam bent down, and took in his the hand which could not raise itself to meet his clasp.

"I'll not say anything more," he said, rather huskily; "I'm a stupid chap at talking always. Only, I'll just take that 'God bless you,' as said, and thank *you* for it. I'm not afraid but what it'll be heard."

He did not see Jesse's face, because all his vision was filled with the light of Sarah's sudden smile turned up to him; he did not feel the death-chill in the hand he held, for the glad warmth that crept into his heart with the grateful pressure of the fingers that closed on his upon the other side.

Sarah stood up the same moment; for Sam there could be no more to be said: he hailed the permission to depart, which he read in her eyes, with relief. She went with him a few paces down the

ward, spoke to him a moment in a low voice. She was only asking him to take Mattie home, and see to her comfort before returning to work. But to the dying man, the looks, the unconscious gestures, the whole suggestion of the bearing of husband and wife towards each other brought a sense of loneliness beyond the necessary loneliness of death. He had not wept at parting with Mattie; yet now, for very pity of himself that he had not been able to weep, his last tears gathered in his eyes. He did not see Sarah come back to the bed; did not notice her till she knelt once more by his side.

"You will let me stay?" she said, gently. "Poor Mattie *would*, I know, but she has known little of trouble, she is easily frightened. It was kind of you to let her go."

He did not dispute it; perhaps he did not take it in. When she said that she would stay, he had turned his head, moved one hand feebly, with the gesture of a child towards its mother.

After a while he fixed his great sad eyes upon her.

"The Lord is just," he said.

She did not quite catch his thought.

"He is compassionate," she said, softly, "and of great mercy."

"Mercy?" he said, almost bitterly. "Ay! Liar, coward, drunkard, hypocrite, and thief: I have plenty of claims on mercy." Then he broke out with a sort of low wailing, which weakness would not allow to rise into a cry: "And a year ago—O God, only a year ago! Why could they not leave me alone? I had never done them any harm that they need have wrecked my life."

It was Mattie's cry over again, and again Sarah was dumb before it. Earthly providences must expect to find their apologists occasionally hard put to it for an answer.

"No," he said, with a sort of resolute humility, after a moment; "He will not suffer any man to be tempted above that he is able. I will not go into His Presence with any lie of an excuse; I have enough to answer for without that. It is myself I have to thank for everything."

It was true courage that kept Sarah from urging the excuses which she felt might have been made. It was well he should not make them.

"Do you know?" he went on, faintly; "I prayed for all this. 'The Lord do so to me and more also'; that is what I said, and He has." She did not understand the allusion to his midnight vow, nor did he seek to explain it. "'More also'; ay, thirty and sixty and a

hundredfold. Shame? You don't know all I have gone through. This—degradation, prison, a nameless grave—a convict's grave: because it is public, it may seem worse, but in the time before—The company I have had to keep, the way they used to speak to me—at me; you heard *him*, but that was only one—there were worse. Shame? To avoid open disgrace, I have drunk its very dregs in secret—drunk them and sucked them out—and after all that—the thing I perilled my soul to escape has come upon me too. Yes; He is just.”

“Else,” said Sarah, “there would be no foundation anywhere. Brother, I would rather that His justice were magnified on me and mine to the uttermost, than that any poor soul, losing faith in that, should lose faith in His goodness too. They must go together.”

“Then what for me?”

“The broken and contrite heart that He will not despise,” she said, gently. “To keep one's promise, one's free promise, that is justice too.”

He sighed a little, but made no answer; he was getting past speech, that last effort had exhausted his strength. After this, for a long, quiet hour, he made no sign nor sound at all. Sarah, too, was silent for the most part; once or twice she repeated a verse or two, once or twice a few words of the prayer which never ceased in her soul broke almost unconsciously from her lips. She could not tell whether either reached a heart which, she felt, was indeed broken; she had to be content with seeing that, if there was little of active hope in his face, neither was there despair.

The broad, unmellowed light of mid-afternoon streamed into the rough, bare ward. Within the building were sounds of steps and voices; from without, through the open window, a trampling of hoofs from the stables; a trooper was whistling as he rubbed down his horse; now and then some group of lounging officials off duty would break into a laugh. Life was in full tide everywhere, ignoring death.

At about four o'clock Jesse opened his eyes. He half raised himself in the bed, and his voice was clear and almost strong.

“The blessing of him that was ready to perish be upon you, sister,” he said. “I'm going.”

And even as he said it, Jesse Runciman was gone.

It is some years, now, since the rough mound of red earth and rocky white stone rose in its raw newness over the nameless grave

he had foretold for himself. Nameless it was, but though long since left, in the now unused cemetery, to such general care as may be bestowed by hireling hands, there are signs still that once it had been owned by affectionate regret. Within the black wood paling the geraniums which Sarah planted still live, though straggling, woody, and overgrown; the tinder-like remains of an everlasting wreath lie, yet, upon the burned-up soil. But no one comes there now; the hands that tended it do their gentle ministrations in Kimberley no more. After all that had happened the place became actually painful to Sarah, nor did Sam feel anything at all of his first enthusiasm for it. They lingered on there for some six months after Jesse's death, Sam always talking about moving, and at last they went. Now, where Grahamstown nestles among trees, in the green hollow of the grassy rolling hills, Sarah has found a more congenial home. As for Sam, if it is a very quiet one, he had been accustomed to quietness all his days; the place where he had undeniably "seen life" had not procured him such experiences as to enamour him of excitement. There are children in the home now, too; in an unbounded and ever-new delight and pride in his little ones, in the certainty that, even in them, he has no rival in his wife's heart; in all this Sam finds a happiness amply sufficient for his simple, kindly soul, which knows little either of ambition or of greed.

It is but seldom he remembers that far-off grave; of all who knew him Sarah alone, perhaps, amid all her sweet content, keeps for Jesse Runciman a memory, tender with mother-like compassion, ever living in her heart.

Westoby does not think of him. Even in circumstances which most tend to brooding over the past, whether for wrath or for regret, he is able to keep his soul out of that hell. Though, if the thought ever did occur he would face it with equanimity, for he considers that he and his victim were very fairly quits. He is still serving his time. If any prospect of remission exists, he does not know of it, and he sets his will as resolutely against the sickening of a doubtful hope as against the imbittering of useless memories. He is not a model convict, but he keeps out of trouble: he is reasonable enough to know when, and, it is fair to say, strong enough to know how, to obey. There have been times, indeed, when the longing for liberty has been almost beyond endurance. But though escape offers no very insuperable difficulties, he has hitherto refrained from attempting it. His is no insignificant form or personality, such as might pass unnoticed anywhere. Nature has made him a marked man; he

recognizes this, and has decided that the satisfaction of two or three days of freedom would not be worth the increase of punishment consequent on recapture. But whether reason will always be strong enough to control the cravings of his deepest nature can scarcely be foretold. The years go very heavily.

Nor does Christian Dreyer think of the man whom he and Westoby did to death between them. Of Westoby he does think, not unfrequently, and always with genuine regard. There are many more recognizedly immoral episodes in his past, which cause him much less distress than does that unfortunate necessary treason. Still he quite feels that it was unavoidable; this certainty modifies remorse into an endurable regret. Him, likewise, Dutoitspan knoweth no more. His appearance as queen's evidence effectually destroyed his prospects among such a *clientèle* as his had been. He disposed of his business fairly well, and made his way to Johannesburg. There, after many months of very fluctuating fortunes, a lucky speculation landed him in prosperity. He did not risk it afresh; there was nothing in Dreyer of the spirit of the gambler, to let well alone was never any difficulty to him. Now, as proprietor of two or three flourishing bars, he is rich enough to afford to be respectable — and very likely he is so. So far, at least, the law knows nothing to the contrary.

And Mattie? For her Runciman had foretold a swift forgetfulness. Yet has the prophecy been but half fulfilled. Outwardly that brief episode of her opening womanhood had scarcely affected her life, except that she severed her connection with the Primitive Gossellers; she goes to church on Sunday evenings now. Otherwise her career is much what it might have been had she never left home. By dint of native talent and of real painstaking, she has worked her way up from very small beginnings to be forewoman in a large millinery establishment in a prosperous northern town. Her experiences have left no trace upon her person; no line of care, no loss of bloom or sparkle, accuses the trouble of her past. She is still young, still pretty. But from a coquette she has become a little bit of a shrew. She has hardened curiously. Man delighteth her not; and she does not always take much pains to hide the fact. There have been those whom the lively cynicism of six-and-twenty has not discouraged; if she had willed, she might have formed new ties ere this. But she will never re-marry. Her mind, indeed, has practically forgotten; but her instinct remembers, and remembers with aversion. Yet memory has lost all power to pain; so far as it

is synonymous with conscious thought it may be said to have ceased to be. Even in dreams the image of Jesse Runciman has long since ceased to haunt.

He would not have wished it otherwise. It is not this that would trouble any peace which may, in Heaven's mercy, have gathered by now about a once very sorely-driven soul.

THE END



